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THE CURSE OF THE SCREAMING SKULL

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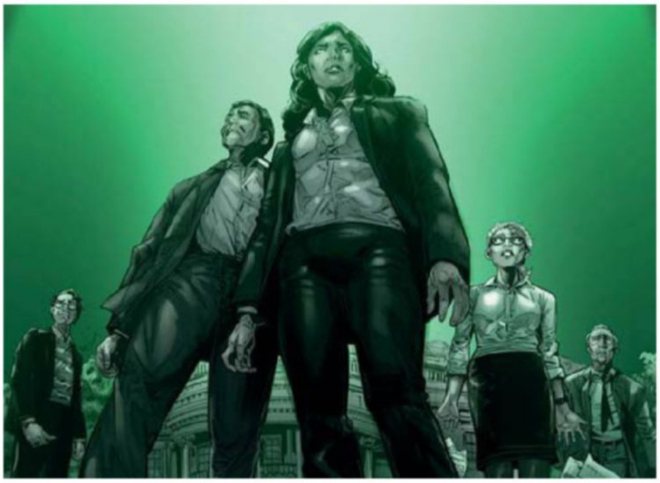
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Why fortean?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

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EDITORIAL

CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

FORTEAN SPRING CLEANING

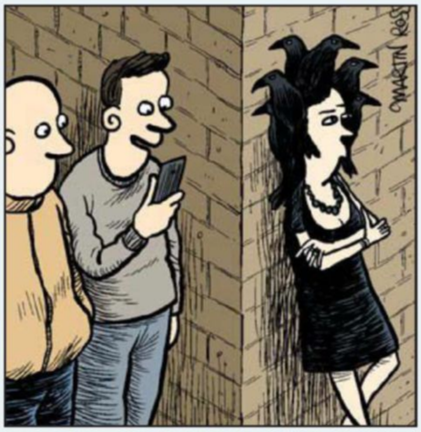
FT REDESIGN

You'll notice a few changes in this latest issue of *Fortean Times*.

The first, you probably spotted when you opened your subscription copy or handed over your hard-earned cash at the newsagent: yes, the price of *FT* has gone up by 25p. Price increases are never welcome news, but please remember that we haven't raised the cover price since August 2008, nearly nine years ago. We hope you'll understand that over that period our costs have continued to increase and that the new price simply reflects that unavoidable reality.

However, we want to make sure that we continue to offer readers the best value for money that we possibly can, so we've taken this opportunity to give *FT* a bit of a spring clean, sprucing up the look of the various sections and trying to make the magazine as a whole a little bit cleaner, clearer and more user-friendly, with some nifty new designs by the *charmante* Capucine Deslouis enlivening the headers and columns. Thanks to all of you on Twitter and Facebook for your input, especially concerning the ever-thorny topic of typeface size. In the end, the consensus was that the size of our fonts was causing a bit of eye strain but that no one wanted a reduction in content due to overenthusiastic embiggening; so, in a spirit of reasonable compromise, we've given them a slight tweak, aiming for greater legibility with no loss of weirdness. Speaking of content, in this issue you'll find a new column devoted to the growing world of fortean podcasts, and in coming months we'll be introducing some more new features to make *FT* even better.

Of course, we welcome your feedback and suggestions: just drop us a line and tell us what you think about the redesign or what you'd like to see more or less of in future issues. Meanwhile, we hope you enjoy an issue packed with avian spectres, amnesiac mermaids, weeping Tsars and talking mongooses...



"Her profile says she's a real raven-haired beauty"

ERRATA

FT347:30: As if the marital arrangements of Mormons weren't complicated enough, the captioning of the two photos at the top of this page suggests that a bit of wife swapping is going on too. Janie Bardsley is married to Steve Bardsley, not Aaron Dale as the caption states. Thanks to David Soltesz of Philadelphia for pointing that one out. Also, imprisoned FLDS leader Warren Jeffs may have as many as 70 wives, not just 20: that was the lesser total notched up by his father Rullon.

FT348:8: Martin Stubbs of London points out that "In 'For Those in Peril' we were told of 'A £1 billion venture by Scottish Power and the National Grid to lay a subsea power cable big enough to connect Scotland and England'. I'm no expert, but I'm pretty sure those places may be connected already. Should we let them know before they spend the whole billion?"

FT351:22: Thanks to Brian Perry of Chilton Polden, Somerset, and Pete Swindells of Wolverhampton for spotting a bit of scientific nonsense in an item about the 'Janus Point'. Here, we referred to "Newton's Second Law of Thermodynamics", but as Brian points out, "the Second Law of Thermodynamics known to modern science was discovered around 1850 by Rudolf Clausius and William Thomson (Lord Kelvin), some 120 or more years after Newton's death", and, as Pete adds, originates with Carnot's theorem of 1824.

DAVID R SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

Paul Sieveking
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

MERMAID AND MOWGLI GIRL

Web-toed mystery woman washes up and 'monkey girl' found in India

Around 3.15am on 4 April, a driver spotted a woman walking down the middle of a dark road near the entrance to a lake just outside the town of Friant in Fresno County, California, about halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. He stopped to ask if she was OK. The 5ft 4in (1.63m) brunette was wearing nothing but a black sports bra and had wet hair. She said she had been in the nearby lake and asked to be taken to hospital, so he drove her to a medical centre where police officers tried to establish her identity. She said that her name was Joanna and that she was a mermaid. They discovered she had webbed toes on both feet. Though "coherent and responsive", she was unable to provide any further information, saying simply "I don't know" in response to most questions.

Two days later, she was identified as a 33-year-old woman from Arlington, Virginia. A relative said she had flown to Fresno a week earlier to check out the area and possibly move there. At the time of going to press, police have refused to release her name or any further information, saying she might be the victim of crime and her privacy should be protected. *independent.co.uk, ABC News (Lynchburg VA), 6 April; sfist.com, 8 April 2017.*

FRESNO COUNTY POLICE DEPT

ABOVE: Fresno County's 'Jane Doe' has been identified, but the mystery continues.

- Meanwhile in India, news has broken of an emaciated girl discovered last January in Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary, a remote nature reserve in Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh, northern India. She was spotted by woodcutters, but when they tried to capture her they were chased off by a troop of monkeys, according to police officer Dinesh Tripathi. The girl was then found by sub-inspector Suresh Yadav while on a routine patrol. "When he called the girl, the monkeys attacked him but he was able to rescue her," said Tripathi. "He sped away with her in his police car while the monkeys gave chase." The girl – thought to be between eight and 12 years old – was tanned by exposure to the elements, had long matted hair and claw-like nails. She behaved like a monkey, running on all fours and screeching to communicate, said DK Singh, chief medical superintendent of the government-run hospital in Bahraich where she was taken. "She would throw food on the ground and eat it directly with her mouth, without lifting it with her hands," he said. "She used to move around using only her elbows and her knees."

Inspector Ram Avtar Singh, from Motipur station in Bahraich, said: "She was terrified of us, she could not speak or hear us properly. She was surrounded by three monkeys. She had wounds on her body specifically on her elbow and one on her leg. She was wearing clothes but not very dirty; it looks like she was abandoned by her family. She looked weak and was very hungry." She was naturally dubbed 'Mowgli girl', after Kipling's story in *The Jungle Book*, about a boy raised by wolves. Local District Magistrate Ajaydeep Singh visited her in hospital and named her "Forest Durga" after the Hindu warrior goddess.

After two months' care, she had been taught to eat with her hands and to walk upright, but still preferred to walk on all fours. Doctors said she was still prone to bouts of anger and violence and didn't appear to understand any language. She was said to be still frightened of humans. Some officials speculated she had been living in the forest since birth – which hardly tallied with the report that she was wearing clothes. Others believe she has mental and physical disabilities, and had probably been abandoned by her carers quite recently. JP Singh insisted she was actually found on a roadside near the forest, not deep in the wilderness. Medical superintendent DK Singh said she would be transferred to the Lucknow Medical College once she had been given a clean bill of health so that she could get better medical care.

There are several reasonably convincing cases of humans raised by apes or monkeys. The earliest 'monkey boy' FT is aware of was found in Sri Lanka in 1973, and named Tissa. A woman now called Marina Chapman [**FT302:24-25**] claims to have lived with monkeys from the ages of four to nine in the Colombian jungle and later wrote a book about it (*The Girl With No Name*, Mainstream Publishing, 2013). A disabled Nigerian boy named Bello was found living with chimpanzees for 18 months in 1996 after he had been abandoned by his family [**FT161:20**]. Six-year-old John Sesebunya was found living with green vervet monkeys (or possibly black and white colubus monkeys) in the Ugandan jungle in 1991 [**FT130:18, 161:39**]. He was studied by a number of experts, all of whom were convinced by his behaviour and interaction with monkeys that he was a genuine feral child. He is believed to have run away from home when he was three years old after seeing his father murder his mother. He was placed in an orphanage and was later adopted. He learned to speak, became a member of the Pearl of Africa children's choir and participated in the Special Olympics, later moving into a home of his own. *Times of India, D.Mail online, 6 April; hindustantimes.com, washingtonpost.com, BBC News, 7 April; Independent, theguardian.com, 8 April 2017.* For a comprehensive survey of feral children throughout history, see 'Wild Things' by Paul Sieveking, **FT161:34-41**.

DEVOTED DOGGIES

Touching tales of incredible canine loyalty

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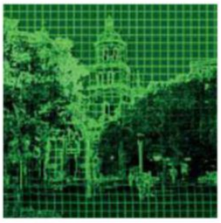

TRAPPED IN THE MATRIX

Is life just a computer simulation?

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SCREAMING SKULLS

In search of a great British ghostly tradition

PAGE 18

THE CONSPIRASPHERE

NOEL ROONEY reports on Katy Perry's unusual Hollywood real estate row, Russia's murky modern mystic and JFK as a conspiracy theorist...

SEX, DRUGS, ROCK 'N ROLL AND NUNS

Katy Perry (well she does have an angelic voice, apparently) used to sing in the church choir: then she found Satan and turned to rock and roll. Solid, normal stuff for a posting to the Conspirasphere; but a tad unusual as an element of a real estate dispute. Ms Perry, whose vocal qualities I leave to the reader's discernment (after watching a couple of YouTube videos looking for Illuminati symbolism, I confess I was underwhelmed, but then I never heard her sing in the church choir) is in the market for a new home, and set her sights on a ramshackle nunnery in Los Angeles.

The last remaining nuns on the premises had other ideas. They lodged a suit against Katy, claiming, among other things, that a recent visit to Salem (a visit Ms Perry claimed not to remember) was in fact a witchcraft pilgrimage. The Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, all five of them, stood resolute against handing over the property to the singer (relying, no doubt, on the principle that the Devil has all the best tunes). The Vatican, historically more pragmatic in these affairs, decided to take the money – a considerable wedge of it – and despite the protestations of the nuns, the nunnery is now firmly in the hands of the godless.

Well, that's showbiz for you. In politics, on the other hand, the presence of the Almighty is an altogether more nuanced, and fraught, affair. In today's Russia, cold pragmatism may appear to be the order of the day, but if rumours about a certain Aleksandr Dugin (see 'Strange Statesmen', **FT349:48-51**) have any traction, then something both murky and mystical is stalking the Kremlin (a piece of ex-religious real estate even the mellifluous Ms Perry would be pushed to afford). Hailed as a visionary by many on the alt-right, a branch of political thought that used to be the lunatic fringe until it got a toponymical makeover (location etc), he is said to be an increasingly influential voice in Russian domestic and foreign policy, credited with, among other things, smoothing the relationship between Russia and Turkey (another country where the separation of religion and state is taking a bit of a hammering) after that unfortunate incident with the anti-aircraft missiles.

But there are those who see Mr Dugin as anything but a do-gooder. Some are calling him the new Rasputin, and suggesting that behind his arch-conservative Orthodox façade (as if that isn't alt-right enough) lies a messianic mania for returning the modern world to a lost mediæval paradise. Describing himself as a 'neo-traditionalist', Dugin advocates disassembling the apparatus of modernity – you know (and I quote) "progress, development, equality, justice, freedom" – in favour of "Tradition, the sacred, the religious, the caste-related". If that sounds like paradise to you, then you probably voted for Donald Trump as a disappointing liberal compromise. His detractors, needless to say, align themselves a little further to the left of Attila the Hun than his supporters.

It makes a nice change to see liberals flirting with conspiracies. Now it turns out that none other than the late, sainted JFK mused on the possibility that Hitler's death was faked and the Führer was still out there somewhere. According to a diary he kept during a trip to Europe in 1945, soon to go to auction, Kennedy had heard the rumours about Hitler's suicide, and was aware that the Russians were sceptical too. Given what he is often (erroneously) quoted as saying a few days before his assassination (you know, the plot thing) you could plausibly add conspiracy to his fragmented and often addled legacy. Who would know?

www.thetruthseeker.co.uk/?p=148658 https://godsandradicals.org/2017/03/28/the-mystic-shaping-russias-future-and-ending-the-modern-era/ www.thetruthseeker.co.uk/?p=149224

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

FIREFIGHTERS RESPOND TO COW WITH CHAIR ON ITS HEAD

[UPI] —Sept 2015

Aliens held in pen

(Queensland) Courier-Mail, 8 Nov 2015

ZOO WELCOMES THE ARRIVAL OF DRAGON

(Wolverhampton) Express & Star, 4 Dec 2015

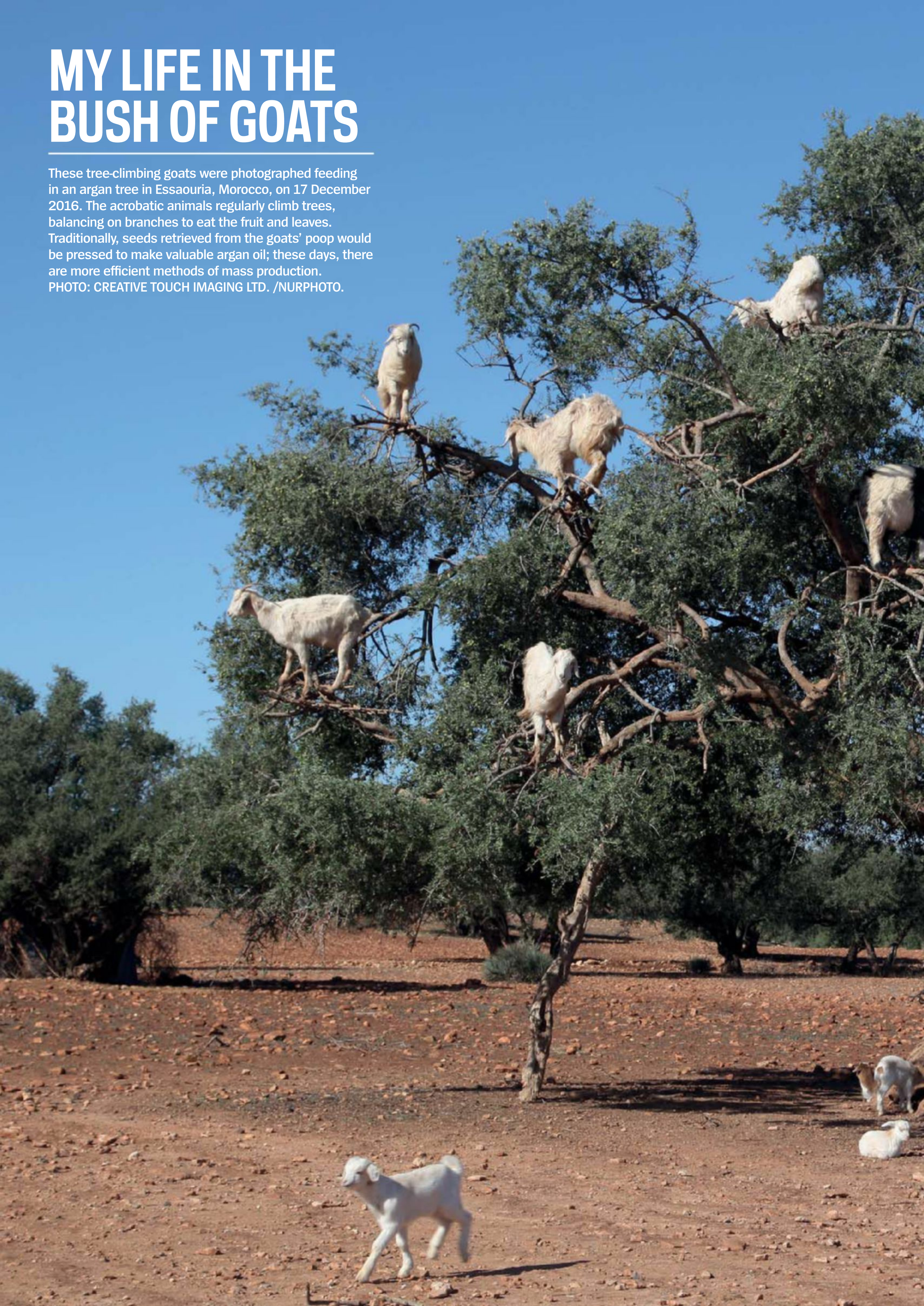
Man injured after being struck by flying hedgehog

(Dundee) Courier & Advertiser, 17 Dec 2015

SAUDI MAN'S FAMILY CALLS FOR DIVORCE AFTER WIFE KISSES CAMEL

(Queensland) Courier-Mail, 8 Nov 2015

MY LIFE IN THE BUSH OF GOATS



These tree-climbing goats were photographed feeding in an argan tree in Essaouria, Morocco, on 17 December 2016. The acrobatic animals regularly climb trees, balancing on branches to eat the fruit and leaves. Traditionally, seeds retrieved from the goats' poop would be pressed to make valuable argan oil; these days, there are more efficient methods of mass production. PHOTO: CREATIVE TOUCH IMAGING LTD. /NURPHOTO.

SIDELINES...

PRESIDENT FLEES GHOSTS

Brazil's president has vacated his official residence in the capital, Brasilia, blaming "bad energy" and the possible presence of ghosts. Michel Temer, 76, and his wife Marcela, 33, a former beauty queen, have left the cavernous, glass-fronted modernist Alvorada Palace (designed by Oscar Niemeyer) and decamped down the road to the smaller Jaburu Palace. Marcela had brought in a priest in an attempt at exorcism, apparently to no avail. *[AFP] 12 Mar 2017.*

ICE TO ICE

Richard Couch, 80, and his wife Theresa, 77, had just started watching ice hockey on TV on 24 February when two chunks of ice smashed through their roof into the basement. These had fallen from a jet into their home in Doverthorn Bay, Calgary, Canada. *Calgary Sun, 25 Feb 2017.*

DOPEY COMPLAINT

A woman called police in Australia's Northern Territory to say she had been ripped off by her cannabis dealer. She demanded they investigate the "outrageous" price hike. When asked for further details, she hung up. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 31 Jan 2017.*

NOT A CLUE

An escaped budgie found repeatedly asking "Where's Dave?" was reunited with its owner in Cheltenham – called Jon. *Metro, 27 Jan 2017.*

MARTIN ROSS

DOGGED DEVOTION

Heartwarming tales of canine loyalty and lifesaving skills...

GRAVESIDE VIGILS

When Margarita Suarez died in Merida, Mexico, in March 2015, her family were stunned to see several dogs appear at the funeral parlour where her body was being kept. Ms Suarez had been feeding stray dogs all her life and even carried bags of food to feed dogs she met. Workers at the funeral home denied any knowledge of the animals and said they had never seen them before. Realising that they had come to pay their respects to Ms Suarez, they allowed them to come in and lie on the floor near her coffin. The dogs even followed her hearse to and from the funeral home, dispersing only when her body was being prepared for cremation. *the-open-mind.com, 1 April 2015.*

- A 6.2R earthquake ripped through central Italy on 24 August 2016, killing about 290 people. Andrea Cossu, 45, was on holiday in the village of Pescara del Tronto when he was killed by a collapsing building. The village was razed to the ground – cars were crushed by pieces of masonry and houses crumbled into dust. Mr Cossu's funeral was held on 26 August in Pomezia, the town south of Rome where he lived. Flash, his loyal cocker spaniel, refused to leave his side, repeatedly pawing at the casket that held the body of his master. Flash will now be looked after by Mr Cossu's wife Rita, who survived the quake. *Sunday Telegraph, Sunday People, Sun on Sunday, 28 Aug 2016.*

- Though the tale of Greyfriars Bobby in Edinburgh turns out to be not quite in line with the legend [**FT297:44-51**], there are many other examples of canine vigils by owners' graves (see, for example, **FT297:24**). Here's another: a loyal dog called Cesur was guard of honour at the funeral of owner Mehmet Ilhan when he died aged 79. The black-and-tan pup could be seen standing by the side of Mehmet's coffin throughout the ceremony at the Central Mosque in Ohraneli, Turkey. Mehmet's son Ali said: "My father was paralysed for many years and adopted Cesur as a puppy two years ago to keep him company. I think Cesur is sad because he is missing him. He wouldn't move away from the coffin, not even an inch, at the funeral and then he followed us to the cemetery and waited until he had been buried. Nowadays he visits the grave every day." *Sun, 27 Jan 2017.*

HOSPITAL HOUNDS

A two-year-old bitch called Maya became a celebrity in Spain last September as she waited for her owner outside the doors of a hospital, a vigil that had lasted six days by the time of the news report. On 28 August Maya's owner, 22-year-old Sandra Iniesta, began feeling intense pain in her abdomen as she, her father

TOP: Flash refused to leave his late master's coffin following Andrea Cossu's death in an earthquake. **ABOVE**: Some of the dogs who appeared to pay their last respects to Margarita Suarez at a funeral home in Mexico.

and the dog were driving to their Barcelona home after a holiday. They stopped at Elda hospital, near Alicante, where Sandra had an emergency appendectomy. Her father, Andrés Iniesta, tried to put Maya back in the car as he drove off to get some rest, but to no avail. Maya refused to be led away, honouring the tradition of her Akita Inu breed, reputed to be among the most loyal dogs in the world. May's loyalty attracted visits and gifts from dozens of fans after hospital staff posted a message of praise on their Facebook page.

Maya has some way to go to emulate another Japanese Akita dog called Hachiko, whose love for his owner was such that he waited for 10 years at a commuter station for the return of his owner who had suffered a fatal stroke. The story was made into a 2009 film starring Richard Gere called *Hachi: A Dog's Tale*. *D.Telegraph, 2 Sept 2016.*

• A dog waited outside a hospital in Limeira, Brazil, for eight days where his homeless friend, Sandro Martins, 40, had been admitted to treat his pneumonia on 15 February. After the dog – called Marronzinho (meaning 'brown') – was on the TV news, Martins was reunited with his family after 10 years by a charity called Angels of the Night. His siblings had thought him dead. *g1.globo.com (Piracicaba, Brazil), 23+25 Feb; Metro, 3 Mar 2017.*

EMERGENCY SERVICES

A three-year-old Rottweiler called Megan saved her unconscious owner by opening the door to paramedics. She kept bouncing on the handle until the door sprung open, allowing an ambulance crew to get inside and treat Gary Gregory, 32, who had serious internal bleeding. It is unlikely he would have survived without the dog's help. Mr Gregory, from Felixtowe in Suffolk, began hæmorrhaging from an internal tear following a hospital endoscopy for gallstones. He managed to dial 999 before falling unconscious. "[The paramedics] were considering calling the police to break down the door," he said, "but by then it could have been too late." *Sun, D.Mirror, 7 Mar 2017*

TOP: Loyal Cesur at Mehmet Ilhan's funeral. **ABOVE**: Maya waits outside the hospital.

• Jenny Deakin, 30, was watching television late one night with her little dog Lily-Rose at home in Chiswick, west London, when a biscuit got lodged in her throat. She collapsed onto the floor where she rolled on to her back. As she started losing consciousness, Lily-Rose, a Spaniel-type Papillon-cross, jumped up and down on her chest and stomach until the deadly crumbs were dislodged. When Ms Deakin saw her reflection in a mirror, her lips were blue and her skin had turned a ghostly grey. "As soon as I saw my reflection I knew I had come so close to being lost," she said. She credits her dog with saving her life, while acknowledging that it is physically impossible for a dog to replicate the Heimlich manoeuvre exactly. The little dog had won numerous awards, including being named Canine World's Wonderdog. (For a Japanese Akita performing a life-saving 'Heimlich manoeuvre' in Nottinghamshire in 2012, see **FT300:10**.) *D.Express, 29 Jan 2016.*

• A guide dog saved his owner's life after detecting toxic fumes from a faulty fridge. Paul Whiting's Labrador-cross Iain started barking when the kitchen filled with gas, alerting the 53-year-old grandfather and his six-year-old grandson Leon. Paul, of Hartlepool, and his wife Barbara were treated in hospital after they inhaled the fumes. *The News (Portsmouth), 16 Sept 2015.*

• A family dog was hailed a hero for licking the face of a deaf 13-year-old boy to alert him that his house was on fire. Nick Lamb was home alone in Indianapolis and sleeping without his hearing aids when the blaze began. The pit bull named Alice licked his face until he awoke to find the house filling with smoke. He quickly covered his nose and mouth with his T-shirt and fled outside. *The News (Portsmouth), 21 July* 2014.

SIDELINES...

DELAYED PREDICTION

Unseen film footage has revealed that when John Lennon visited Athens with Yoko Ono in November 1969, an astrologer told him that he "would be shot on an island". The couple were so alarmed that they cancelled a trip round the Greek islands on a yacht owned by the singer Donovan, due to start the next day. Eleven years later, on 8 December 1980, the Beatle was shot dead on Manhattan island. *Sunday Times, 11 Dec 2016*.

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

Merlih Gokcek, the mayor of Ankara since 1994, tweeted that there was an attempt by "outside forces" to trigger an earthquake near Istanbul in an effort to stage an economic coup. Two quakes had struck the western Canakkale region in the previous week. *Times, 8 Feb 2017*.

TRUE TO FORM

Firefighters rescued a retired racehorse from a steep ditch in South Newington, Oxfordshire, using slings and harnesses and digging a gully. The mare was called Tight Squeeze. *Times, 2 Jan 2017*.

COW'S SNAKE SNACK

Janet Buchanan, who owns a farm inland from Bundaberg in Queensland, observed one of her cows eating a green tree snake. "She finished the whole thing," said Ms Buchanan. "I'm so amazed, and luckily I had my phone to record it or no one would have believed me." *(Queensland) Gold Coast Bulletin, 6 April 2016.*

MARTIN ROSS

SIDELINES...

FAR FROM HOME

A red-footed booby, a Caribbean native, became the first ever recorded in Britain when it washed up, dehydrated and underweight, in St Leonards, East Sussex, last September. Three months later, British Airways flew it 5,000 miles to join a flock in the Cayman Islands. The birds, with wingspans up to 1m (3ft 3in), are not migratory. *D.Telegraph, 17 Dec; D.Mirror, 24 Dec 2016*.

NOT FUSSY EATERS

Thirteen youths from the village of Khok Sung in Thailand's Bang Sai Yai sub-district dug up a pile of headless dog corpses to eat, but were rushed to hospital for jabs in Mukdaharn two days later when the animals were found to have rabies (the heads had been sent away for analysis). *thaivisa.com, 27 Oct 2016.*

ASIAN HORNETS ARRIVE

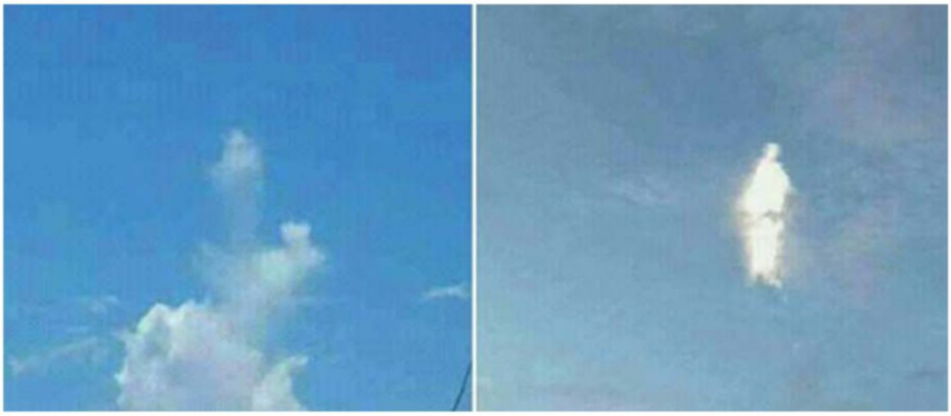
On 17 September a single Asian hornet (*Vespa velutina*) was found near Tetbury, Gloucestershire – the first time the species (which decapitates honeybees) has been seen in Britain. A nest found nearby at the top of a 55ft (16.8m) conifer tree was removed and destroyed. The inch-long hornets are now common across Europe after being accidentally introduced to France in 2004 in a shipment of pottery from China. *BBC News, 20 Sept, 1 Oct; Western Daily Press, D.Mail, 21 Sept, 5 Oct 2016.*

FRANCE
CHINA

MARTIN ROSS

CLOUD IMAGES

Recent pictures in the clouds have ranged from the miraculous to the diabolical...



JOEY MATAELE / TWITTER

ABOVE: Joey Mataele captured these shots of a cloudy Christ-like figure. **BELOW**: Hurricane Matthew as a sinister, grinning skull.

'JESUS' IN THE SKY

A photograph has surfaced showing a figure in the sky above the Pacific island nation of Tonga. It was taken on New Year's Day by local resident Joey Mataele, above his brother's house in the village of Halaleva in Tongatapu. Mr Mataele, a devout Catholic, saw the cloud as an image of Jesus, a sign from the heavens. "This is an image that was unexpected and I know it's a miracle in my life," he said. "Thank you Lord for everything you've provided for me and my family." Mr Mataele took two photos of the figure as the shape was developing. In the first, the figure is less prominent, and is surrounded by other clouds; in the second, the rest of the clouds have vanished and the shape of a person can be seen. *au.news.yahoo.com, 15 Feb 2017.*

EVIL EYE

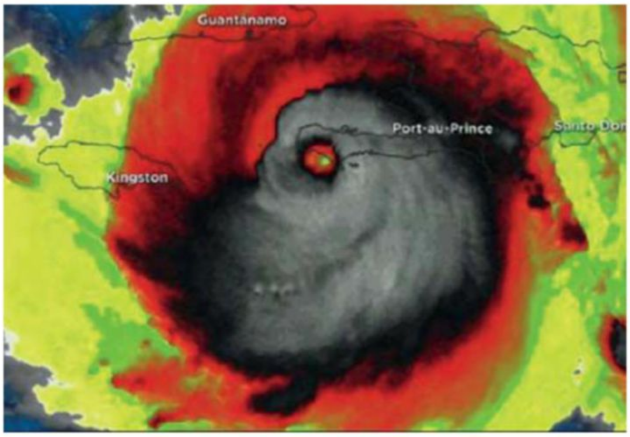
As Hurricane Matthew made landfall in Haiti on 4 October 2016 – the first category 4 hurricane to do so since Cleo in 1964 – a grinning skull appeared in a satellite image, with the eye of the storm in blue and green actually looking like an eye in the skull. The sinister simulacrum was captured by NASA's Earth Science division's live satellite cameras and was posted on Twitter by Stu Ostro, Senior Director of Weather Communications at The Weather Channel. Mr Ostro insisted that the image was "unaltered" in response to claims it had been photoshopped. He added that the "freaky face" reminded him of an image of 2005's tropical cyclone Hurricane Wilma featuring a "sinister grin, eyeing where it's going". Matt Devitt of WINK Weather also shared the image, explaining: "I can confirm this satellite image of Matthew's landfall is REAL and not photoshopped. Captured this morning during my weathercast. Freaky!" *D.Telegraph, 6 Oct; D.Mail, 7 Oct 2017.*

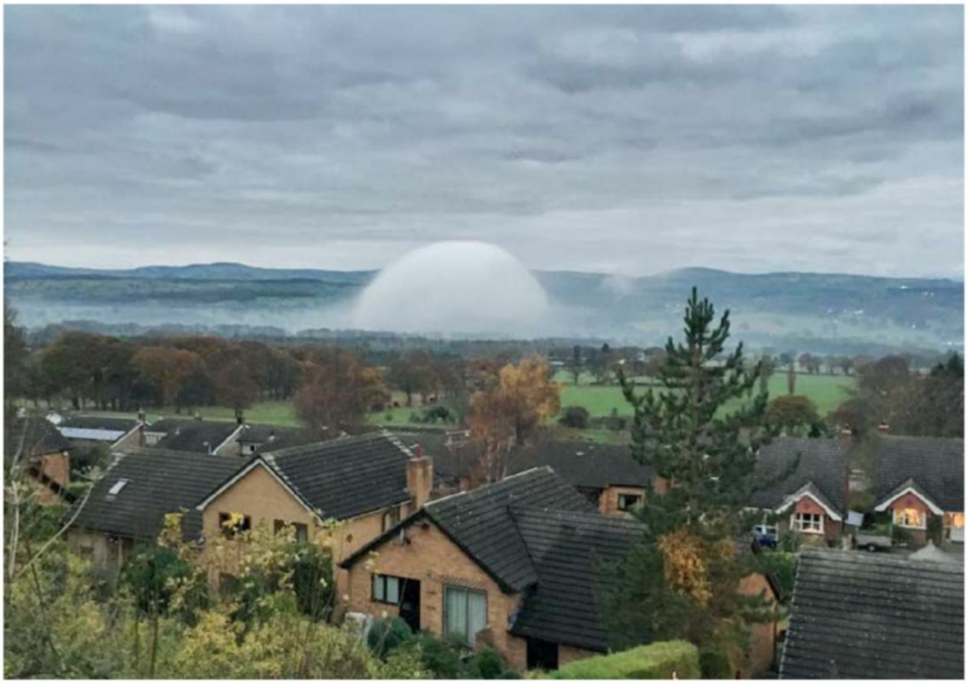
FOG DOME

Hannah Blandford, 33, was out walking her dog in Tremeirchion, North Wales, early in the morning on 2 December when she came across this dome-shaped cloud of fog, shaped like a Christmas pudding. "I just couldn't believe how perfectly dome-shaped it was," she said. "After about 10 minutes it started to flatten and looked like low-lying cloud along the fields but over quite a big area, it was huge." Met Office forecaster John West said: "The most likely explanation is that the 'fog dome' has been caused by a source of heat close to the ground, possibly an agricultural building or a relatively warm pool of water. As the fog has formed in the valley this heat source has forced the fog to lift away from the ground into a dome as warmer air rises; like a hot air balloon." *BBC News, 2 Dec; Sun, 4 Dec 2016.*

CLOUD STRIPES

Australian Instagram user Ilya Katsman, 22, from Adelaide, captured a striking cloud phenomenon while flying with Virgin Airways over the Great

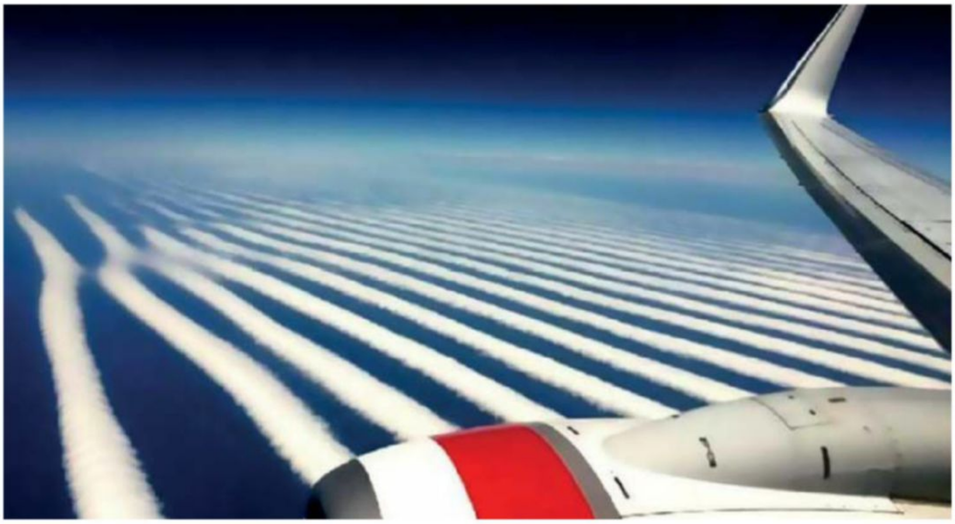



HANNAH BLANDFORD / BAV MEDIA

ABOVE: A dome-shaped cloud of fog over Tremeirchion, Wales. **LEFT**: A strikingly stripy formation in the skies above Australia.

Australian Bight, en route from Perth to Adelaide. Inevitably, conspiracy theorists were quick to see the cloud stripes as proof of chemtrails or geo-engineering. The chemtrail conspiracy theory is the belief that the white trails left in the sky behind aircraft consist of chemical agents deliberately sprayed to brainwash or sicken the general public – while the geo-engineering conspiracy theory is the belief that the spray is a large-scale intervention aiming to reduce adverse climate change. “Passing geo-engineering off as natural cloud formations is disgusting,” said someone calling herself ‘Laydee Lisa’. “I’ll never ever fly Virgin and will make sure I encourage others not to either. Branson must be making a truck load out of big pharma to stoop this low.”

In fact, the stripes are a natural Australian phenomenon called morning glories (arcus or roll clouds). “We see morning glory clouds similar to this in the Gulf of Carpentaria [in Queensland] every spring,” wrote Tex Battle. “[They were] first reported by a ship’s captain in the 1870s.” The long rolling clouds, usually seen in spring, occur when the ocean is generally cool while the land is warm. “It’s like skimming a stone across a lake,” said Neil Bennett, from Australia’s Bureau of Meteorology. “The air is rising up and down in a wave motion. Where it’s going up you’re getting the cloud, and where it’s going down you’re getting the clear lines.” Mr Katsman said: “The cloud is definitely impressive. I thought it was unusual to see it so far south.” *businessinsider.com.au, BBC News, 11 Jan 2017.*


ILYA KATSMAN / INSTAGRAM

SIDELINES...

THAT’S NUTS!

For 25 years, a man from Ankang in China’s Shaanxi province used a hand grenade to crack walnuts. It had been given to him by a friend, and apparently he had no idea what it was until he saw a photo of a grenade in a leaflet warning about forbidden explosives, handed out by local police. *dailymail.co.uk, 21 Dec 2016*.

CRAB ADVENTURE

A crab was spotted scuttling down the aisle of carriage D of a train from Manchester, 40 miles inland, on 16 October. It was ushered off the train at Cheltenham Spa, Gloucestershire, where a conductor scooped it up in a bag. *Western Daily Press, 19 Oct 2016*.

REEF DISCOVERED

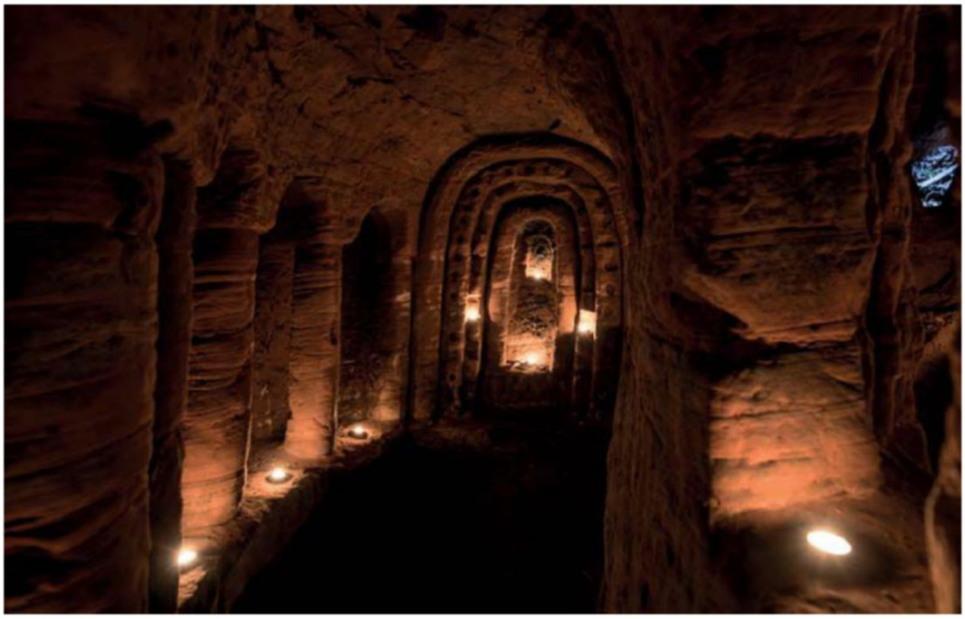
An unknown coral reef 600 miles (965km) long, stretching from French Guiana to Brazil’s Maranhao state, has been found at the mouth of the Amazon during efforts to look for new oil drilling sites. The find was particularly unexpected because there had never been any evidence of corals thriving in such muddy, sediment-filled waters. The reef has at least 60 unique species of sponges, 73 species of fish and several types of lobsters. *theguardian.com, 25 April 2016.*

ONE ZERO ONE ZERO

Scores of ones and zeroes stolen from addresses mounted on the homes of Philadelphia residents were recovered after a white trash bag containing 83 metal address markers (56 ones and 27 zeroes) was left on 12 December at the home of Meghan Haley. Haley earlier released surveillance footage of a man and woman going around the neighbourhood in September ripping zeroes and ones off the front of homes. The motive was unknown; it may have been for an art installation. *[AP] 13 Dec 2016.*

SUBTERRANEAN NEWS

A lost Assyrian palace in Mosul, a 'Templar' grotto in Shropshire and some legendary Mexican tunnels...



MICHAEL SCOTT / CATERS NEWS

ABOVE: The mysterious Caynton Caves are most likely an 18th or 19th century grotto rather than a hangout for the Knights Templar. **BELOW**: The tunnels discovered under the city of Puebla in Mexico in 2015 have now been opened to the public.

DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

The Caynton Caves are located less than a metre underground near Shifnal in Shropshire, accessed via a capacious rabbit hole in a field. Their original purpose is shrouded in mystery, but Historic England, which describes the caves as a "grotto", believes they were probably built in the late 18th or early 19th century and include "neo-Norman decoration to bays between columns, one neo-Norman doorway with beak-heads and roll moulding; decorative quatrefoils and designs abound." The caves appear to be have been used for black magic rites by modern-day visitors and were sealed up by the current landowner in 2012 in an effort to stop such activities – but efforts to barricade the entrance with iron bars have failed to prevent those of a curious disposition getting inside.

Michael Scott, 33, from Birmingham, went to photograph the caves after seeing a video of them online. "I traipsed over a field to find it, but if you didn't know it was there you would just walk right past it," he said. "Considering how long it's been there it's in amazing condition. It's like an underground temple. I had to crouch down and once I was in it was completely silent. There were a few spiders in there but that was it. It was raining so the slope down was quite sludgy, but inside the cave was bone dry."

> *"If you didn't know it was there you would walk right past it"*

The tunnel leads to a network of walkways and arches carved out of sandstone, as well as a font. Some chambers are so small that visitors have to enter them on hands and knees. According to local legend, they were used by followers of the Knights Templar in the 17th century, but the Order was disbanded in 1308, so this seems very unlikely. *D.Mail, 8 Mar; BBC News, 9 Mar 2017.*

PUEBLA TUNNELS

In 2015, a series of tunnels dating back to 1531 and long believed to be mere legend was uncovered beneath the streets of Heroica Puebla de Zaragoza in Mexico. Many Mexican cities have legends about secret tunnels lying just beneath the streets, used during the revolution or even at the time of the Inquisition. The discovery of the Puebla tunnels lends some credence to the folklore.

High enough for someone to comfortably ride through on horseback, the tunnels originate in the historic centre of the baroque city and come out at the Loreto fort. Archæologists initially took them to be a complex sewer system, but

ARIS MESSINIS / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Layla Salih, head of Antiquities for the province of Nineveh, inside one of the Daesh underground tunnels in eastern Mosul. **BELOW**: The discovery of an unexplored 2,300–year-old Assyrian palace and its treasures was completely unexpected.

subsequent discoveries led them to believe they were used for secret travel. Along with toys, marbles, and antique kitchen goods, a lot of guns, bullets, and gunpowder were found trapped in the mud. The weaponry was mostly from the mid-19th century, around the time of the Battle of Puebla (5 May 1862) between Mexico and France. The tunnels may also have been used by soldiers during the war of Mexican liberation (1810-21) – or indeed by clergy or ordinary people. Parts of the tunnel system are now open to the public and house a free museum known as "Secrets of Puebla," and function as a citywide thoroughfare. *D. Telegraph, 5 Sept 2015; Yucatan Times, 16 Mar 2016; atlasobscura.com, 13 Mar 2017.*

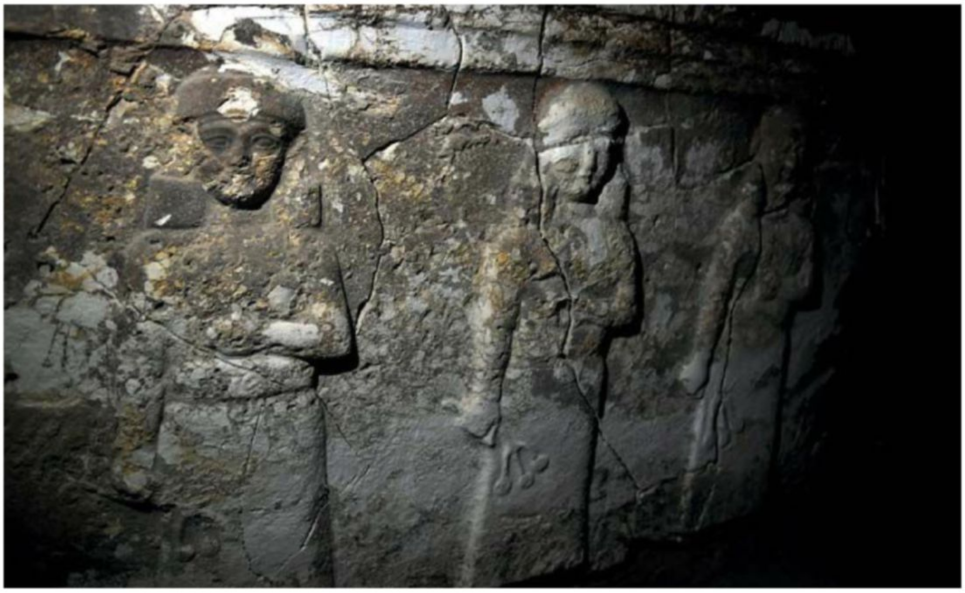
PALACE DISCOVERED

A major Assyrian palace, long buried underneath the shrine of the prophet Jonah, has been discovered as a result of the dynamiting of the site in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul by Daesh (ISIS) in July 2014. According to tradition, the shrine was built on the burial site of Jonah (known in the Q'uran as Yunus) – situated on top of a hill in eastern Mosul called Nebi Yunus – one of two mounds that form part of the ancient Assyrian city of Nineveh. When it was taken by Iraqi troops last January, archæologists found that Daesh had tunnelled underneath, revealing a completely unexpected treasure: the 2,300-year-old palace of King Sennacherib (705-681 BC). During his reign, Nineveh was one of the richest cities in the world. His military campaign against the Kingdom of Judah is described in the Bible.

The palace was later expanded by his son, Esarhaddon (681-669 BC), and partly destroyed during the Sack of Nineveh in 612 BC. Archæologists are working urgently to save whatever they can, as the tunnels are unstable. "I can only imagine how much Daesh discovered down there before we got here," said Iraqi archæologist Layla Salih, a former curator of the Mosul museum supervising a five-man team carrying out the emergency documentation. "We believe they took many of the artefacts, such as pottery and smaller pieces, away to sell. But what they left behind [including a marble cuneiform inscription of King Esarhaddon thought to date from 672 BC] will be studied and will add a lot to our knowledge of the period."

The site was largely unexplored, and though two previous excavations were carried out, the most recent in the 1950s, archæologists had never reached as far as the palace. In another part of the tunnel they discovered stone sculptures of an Assyrian demi-goddess, depicted sprinkling the "water of life" to protect humans in her care. "There's a huge amount of history down there, not just ornamental stones," said Professor Eleanor Robson, chair of the British Institute for the Study of Iraq. "It is an opportunity to finally map the treasure-house of the world's first great empire, from the period of its greatest success."

After Daesh destroyed the shrine, archæologists discovered the it had been built on the ruins of a church, originally called the Monastery of Jonah, dating from the fourth century Christian Syriac denomination. According to tradition, the church contained a piece of Noah's Ark. The Shrine of Jonah was closed to Christians in 1902. Even within Islam, the site is not universally accepted as the biblical prophet's burial place. In the Jewish tradition, Jonah returned to his hometown of Gath-Hepher in the Galilee after his mission to Nineveh and was buried there. Another Islamic shrine in Halhul near Hebron is claimed to be the Jewish prophet's burial site. *breakingisraelnews.com, D.Telegraph, 28 Feb; D.Mirror, 8 Mar 2017.*



ARIS MESSINIS / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Prisoners of the Matrix

DAVID HAMBLING wonders whether we're all just living in a computer-generated simulation

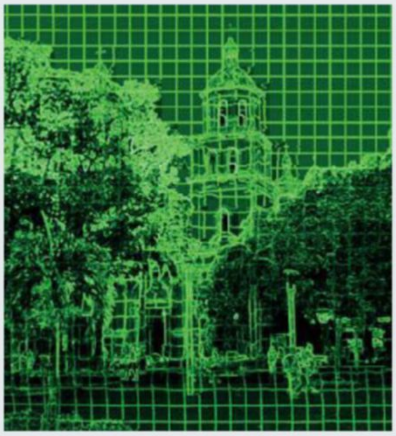
Is the world real, or just a dream? Many philosophers have concluded that the world that we perceive is an illusion, with true reality hidden from us. This conundrum gained new urgency from suggestions that, in all probability, our world is a computer-generated Matrix rather than the real thing.

The idea that we may not experience reality directly has been a cornerstone of Western philosophy since Plato's allegory of the cave, from around 500 BC. Plato compares us to prisoners chained underground, whose only experience is the shadows cast by puppets on the cave walls. The puppets are representations of real objects, which the prisoners only know from their shadows. The prisoners have no understanding of the true reality until they are freed from their cave, a process which Plato optimistically assumed might occur with death.

Vedic philosophers used the term 'Maya', meaning roughly 'illusion'; the everyday world exists, but it is not what it appears to be. In the 17th century, philosopher René Descartes concluded that an evil genie could create illusions that would fool our senses completely. There was no logical way of telling if anything was real or just a dream, except, Descartes concluded, his own existence. His own sense of being could not be illusory because someone must be experiencing the illusion. This was the famous "I think, therefore I am".

Descartes had to resort to a supernatural genie for his argument, but by the 20th century, philosophers could put the challenge in terms of 'a brain in a bottle'. How can you tell that your entire experience of the world is not simply a series of electrical impulses fed to your disembodied brain by some evil scientist? Neuroscience had shown that our brain experiences only nerve impulses from other organs. From the point of view of the brain, there is no difference between the smell of a rose produced by olfactory cells in the nose and the same sensation generated artificially. An entire reality could, in theory, be faked by this means, though before computers it was hard to see how.

While science-fiction authors (notably Phil K Dick) played with artificial dream worlds extensively in the 20th century, the idea gained traction in the public mind with the *Matrix* trilogy of films in the early 2000s. These depict a 21^{st}-century dystopia in which the entire human race was hooked up to a shared virtual reality by malign computers. Everyone believed they were living in the normal world when in fact their bodies were suspended in life-support pods, making them effectively bottled brains, their reality a giant video game.



EEIM / CREATIVE COMMONS

Is experience a series of electrical impulses fed to your brain by an evil scientist?

The idea can be taken one step further. In the Matrix situation, there is the possibility of 'waking up', unplugging and escaping the computers. However, it is theoretically possible to create a software copy of a human brain, running on computer hardware, an emulation of a human being. A copy of you could be living in a virtual world while believing him/herself to be the original. In this situation there can be no escape. You have no body to unplug.

In 2003, Nick Bostrom, a Swedish philosopher at the University of Oxford, pointed out that the problem is one of numbers. If we accept that there could be software copies of you, how many could there be? According to his 'simulation argument', the power of future computers, and the length of future history, means there could be a vast number of copies, but only one original. Whatever the motive for the copies – alien zoos, history research projects or future artworks – there might be a lot of them over the next few billion years.

Elon Musk is a high-profile fan of the simulation argument, and claims there is only a "one in billions" chance that we are not living in a simulation. Just in case we are in 'base reality' though, Musk is encouraging efforts to prevent artificial intelligence from taking over and enslaving us.

Physicists have their own spin on this argument, in the form of theoretical entities known as Boltzmann Brains. Quantum physics says that particles may come spontaneously into being out of empty space. The vast majority of these will be simple fundamental particles, but there is an infinitesimal chance of a fully formed, self-supporting intelligence appearing from nowhere. This is a Boltzmann Brain, and might be identical to your brain, complete with all your memories right up to this moment and your perceptions of the world around you now. A Boltzmann Brain might cease to exist a fraction after it appeared – floating in interstellar space is not a sustainable situation – but given a potentially infinite size of the Universe, there is a far greater chance that, at any given moment, anyone having your experience is a Boltzmann Brain rather than a human being.

The philosophical argument tends to deteriorate into solipsism, the idea that your self is the only real thing in the Universe. Other people are just characters in a computer game or dream. While this is logically unassailable, it is an unhelpful position, encouraging the philosopher to be a selfish, self-centred psychopath with utter disregard for others. This does not attract university funding from patrons.

However, if we accept the simulation argument, then other people are as real as you, all trapped in the same world. Some thinkers, such as cognitive scientist Marvin Minsky, have suggested we can discover if we are living in a simulated world by looking for errors or flaws in the simulation. These would be 'glitches in the Matrix' where the laws of physics break down.

This of course, is the very stuff of forteana. Time slips, impossible appearances and disappearances, out-of-place objects, and Charles Fort's other discoveries might all be mistakes in the structure of reality, programming bugs in our worldware. Unexplained, or inexplicable, phenomena might be the best evidence possible that we are living in a poor simulation of the genuine reality.

Otherwise, watch out for the words 'Game Over' when you die.

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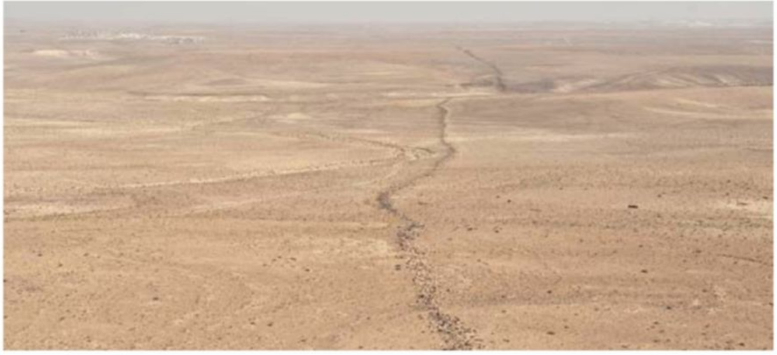
MAKE A LOAN – CHANGE A LIFE

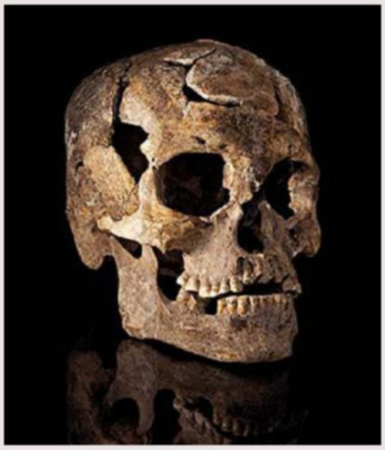
ARCHÆOLOGY A MONTHLY EXCAVATION OF ODDITIES AND ANTIQUITIES

PAUL DEVEREUX investigates a mysterious Jordanian wall and some skulls with stories to tell


WWW.APAAME.ORG

WONDER WALL

There are certain special walls in the world, such as the Great Wall of China, or Hadrian's Wall, or Donald Trump's proposed bigly wall along the US southern border, and now we have the Mystery Wall of Jordan, known as Khatt Shebib. It was first reported in 1948 by diplomat Sir Alec Kirkbride, who noticed a "stone wall running, for no obvious purpose, across country" while flying over Jordan. Now, archæologists with the Aerial Archæology in Jordan (AAJ) project have produced a new map of the feature. This shows it to extend north-northeast to south-southwest for 106km (66 miles), containing sections where a parallel wall runs alongside, and other places where there are branches off it. "If we add the spurs and stretches of parallel wall, the total [wall length] may be about 150km (93 miles)," write researchers from the University of Western Australia and Oxford University in a recent paper (in *Zeitschrift für Orient-Archäologie*). No one knows exactly when the wall was built, who built it, or for what purpose. The feature is now in a ruinous state, but even originally it could never have been much more than one metre high or half that in width, so it certainly wasn't for defensive purposes. The archæologists also found the remains of about 100 so-called towers, measuring 2-4m (7-12ft) in diameter, positioned at locations along the wall. At least some of them appear to have been constructed after the wall was built. Like the wall, their purpose is unknown; the researchers hazard various guesses – they may have been refuges, or secure places for travellers to shelter overnight, or perhaps they were watchtowers (watching for what?), or even hunters' observation posts. Pottery found in the towers and other sites along the wall date to sometime between the Nabatæan period (312 BC–AD 106) and the Umayyad period (AD 661–750), though even that does not necessarily date the wall itself. *Live Science, 18 Feb 2017.*



SKULL DUGGERY

Two partial archaic human skulls dug up at the Lingjing archæological site (Xuchang, central China), not only offer a new insight into the biology of the immediate predecessors of modern humans in eastern Eurasia, but also provide palæontologists with a puzzle – they aren't the skulls of any securely known previous human species.

The skulls, discovered in 2007 and 2014, are between 100,000 and 130,000 years old. They have a range of odd characteristics: they've got Neanderthals' ear canals, eastern Eurasian humans' low and flat brainpans, and similarities to early modern Old World humans too. We've already noted in this column that modern humans did for a while mate with Neanderthals, but these Lingjing skulls display too broad a set of characteristics to account for that explanation. The researchers speculate the skulls might possibly be the issue of Denisovans, a recently discovered ancient and somewhat randy human cousin thought to have interbred with both humans and Neanderthals. But for now, at least, the researchers have to settle for the fact that the skulls (from which DNA could not be extracted) represent "a kind of unknown or new archaic human". *Smithsonian Smart News, 3 Mar 2017* (original report in *Science*).

IMMIGRANTS OF YESTERYEAR

Talking of skulls, research using new technology and techniques on ancient skulls found in the Lapo do Santo cave, Brazil, has produced findings that challenge the overly simplistic idea that America was peopled only by a main wave of Palæoamericans from Siberia who crossed the Bering Strait about 14,000 years ago. The researchers, from US, European and South American institutions, say their new examinations of these skulls suggests that the first settlers of the New World may have come from more than one place (including Australasia). The skull shapes differ markedly from those of modern indigenous South Americans, suggesting they came from somewhere else, perhaps in multiple migratory waves. This matches findings also being made in Mexico. (The matter of the peopling of the Americas is covered, among many other fascinating things, in this columnist's *Mysterious Ancient America*, available inexpensively from www.pauldevereux.co.uk.) *Phys.org News, 23 Feb 2017* (original report in *Science Advances/ American Journal of Physical Anthropology*.)

TEN YEARS ON

On a personal note, *Time & Mind – The Journal of Archæology, Consciousness and Culture*, has entered its 10th year of publication. To mark the occasion, the March 2017 edition is a special issue, 'Making the Old Stones Speak', themed on archæoacoustics. Take a look: its website is www.tandfonline.com/rtam – and if you are really quick, you might just be able to download PDFs of papers in the issue free of charge (it's a time-limited offer). In any case, you'll be able to read the abstracts, or, of course, subscribe and so support non-fake-news in archæology!

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

211: TILL DEATH DO US PART

“ My grandpa died yesterday. I ought to know because I shot him. So come, join me in the fight against patricide by killing your father’s father” – Jarod Kinz, *The Days You Are Here! Wake Me Up When They’re Over!*

Avunculicide, Filicide, Fratricide, Matricide, Nepoticide, Prolicide, Sororicide, Uxoricide. Take your pick: all anciently ubiquitous.

Start with the Bible – where else? – with Cain (Genesis 4.8) fatally dis-Abeling his brother.

Then there were Athalia and Jehoram (2 Chronicles 21-3). He’d slaughtered all his brothers. She would do the same to her royal grandchildren. A short-lived marriage: after two years in power, “his bowels fell out” – finally lost the stomach for it. She had seven sanguinary years before a priest-led uprising did for her.

Over in Greece, Agamemnon, having sacrificed one daughter to procure favourable winds for crossing to Troy, was (prefiguring Marat) murdered in his bathtub by wife and lover, they in turn receiving nemesis from children Electra and Orestes.

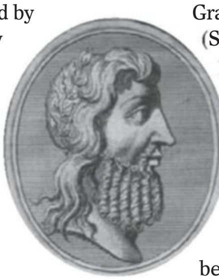
Mustn’t overlook Atreus who baked brother Thyestes’s children in a pie (no room for four-and-twenty-blackbirds), served them up, then produced their heads and hands in mockery – Gore, Blimey!

This (con)fusion cooking is clearly the model for Shakespeare’s ‘Slasher-play’, *Titus Andronicus*; cf. Peter Greenaway’s once-notorious *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife & Her Lover*.

Not forgetting Medea who, after killing and dismembering her brother, slit Jason’s father’s throat, tricked Pelias’s daughters into boiling him for rejuvenation, immolated Jason’s mistress with a flammable dress, and dispatched their children to spite him for playing away – Have Some Medea, Me Dear (Flanders & Swan, adapted)

When Persian Queen Amestris saw her daughter-in-law parading around in a royal dress, she mutilated the latter’s mother by lopping off breasts, ears, lips, and nose, ripping out tongue and parcelling her back to hubbie (Herodotus, bk9 ch114) – Out-Bridezillas Bridezilla. For good measure, she buried 14 young noblemen alive.

Nothing to choose between Orientals and Greeks. Hard to keep score, impossible to list every source. Alexander the Great’s family and dynastic rivals provide a grisly cornucopia (see ‘Ancient Assassins?’, **FT351:36-39**). Olympias may have contrived the deaths of husband Philip and son Alex. She certainly barbecued the infant children of another Philip spouse (Cleopatra, one of five): “You’re not kebabbing me” – Neil Kinnock.



HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

Queen Amastris was drowned by her sons (284 BC). One Ptolemy killed his mother at accession, also scalding an unwanted infant to death in its bath. Another assassinated his mother, yet another his wife. Elizabeth Taylor (aka Cleopatra VII) almost certainly had two young brother-husbands liquidated.

King Aristobulus of Judæa and Seleucid Antiochus were both fratricides (Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, bk1 ch77 para7; *Jewish Antiquities* bk13 ch11). Mithridates of Pontus murdered brother and perhaps mother, being himself un-poisonable thanks to a daily diet of antidotes (likewise, Nero’s mother, hence the collapsible boat wheeze).

Rome’s history kicked off with Romulus (above) disposing of brother Remus. Its last royal pair, Tarquinius (nicknamed ‘The Proud’) and Tullia, gained power after liquidating their respective siblings and her incumbent father Servius Tullius, extra notoriety accruing from her contemptuous running-over of his mutilated body in her chariot – filial esprit de corpse.

They were overthrown by Brutus (possible ancestor of the ‘Honourable’ one of Ides of March infamy (“Infamy, Infamy, They’ve all got it in for me!” – Kenneth Williams as Cæsar, *Carry On, Cleo*), who established the new Republican morality by ordering and watching the execution of his two sons for treason (all this in Livy’s first two books). Manlius Torquatus (Consul 299 BC) would likewise execute a son for breach of military discipline (Livy again). Near the Republic’s end (Dio Cassius, bk37 ch36 para4), senator Aulus Fulvius and “many other fathers” slew their sons for involvement in Catiline’s (thanks to Cicero) famous conspiracy.

Contrariwise, after Tullia, there was (Plutarch, *Romulus*, ch22 para4) no case of parricide at Rome until a Lucius Hostius thereby had his 15 minutes of fame “some time after the Second Punic War.” The established penalty for dad-dumping doubtless deterred many. Sown up alive in a sack with (details vary) a cockerel, dog, monkey, and snake, the miscreant was tossed into the Tiber – that was their bag: Nudge, Nudge, Wink, Wink to *Midsomer Murders*’ scriptwriters.

Graffiti threatening this (Suetonius, *Nero* ch45 para2) prompted him to suicide. Nero was among the most versatile of –cides, bumping off mother, two wives (Octavia suffocated in sauna, pregnant Poppæa kicked to death), half-brother (poisoned), and stepson (drowned) – “I didn’t want to be a monster. The Gods willed it” (Peter Ustinov, *Quo Vadis?*)

Romans regularly outdid their Hollywood scriptwriters. Princess Livilla was locked up and starved to death by mother Antonia (Dio Cassius, bk58 ch11 para7). Commodus, who may have poisoned father Marcus Aurelius, certainly executed sister Lucilla (Herodian bk1 ch8 para8 –”You Picked a Fine Time to Leave Me, Lucille”, Kenny Rogers).

Other maybes include Livia (reported as doing in Augustus with poisoned figs), Agrippina (Claudius and the mushrooms: **FT206:21**), and Plotina, wife of Trajan who supposedly poisoned him to put lover Hadrian on the throne, the latter going on allegedly to get rid of wife Sabina for nagging him – these Roman soap operas put *Eastenders* and ‘Corrie’ to shame.

Nothing changed with the advent of Christianity. Constantine I, first emperor to adopt it, had son Crispus poisoned and wife Fausta suffocated (like Octavia) in a sauna at the urging of mother (later Saint; cf. Evelyn Waugh’s novel) Helena; cf. for source-investigation, P Guthrie, *Phoenix* 24 (1966), 325-31; for sheer delight, Gibbon, *DFRE*, ch18.

At Constantine’s death (337), his three sons and heirs consolidated their position by a “promiscuous massacre” (Gibbon) of two uncles and seven cousins – their *Annus Horribilis* rather more drastic than Mrs Mountbatten’s.

“The most loving parents and relatives commit murder with smiles on their faces” – Jim (The Doors) Morrison

In search of the screaming skulls

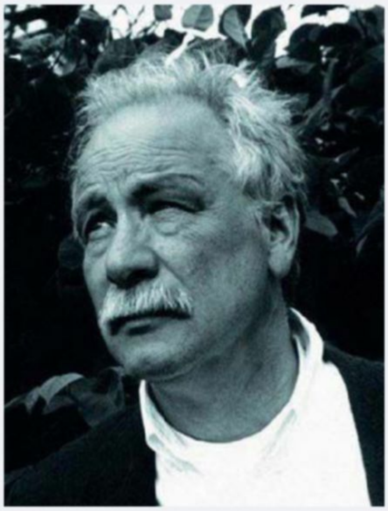
ALAN MURDIE celebrates a peculiarly British contribution to the world's ghostlore

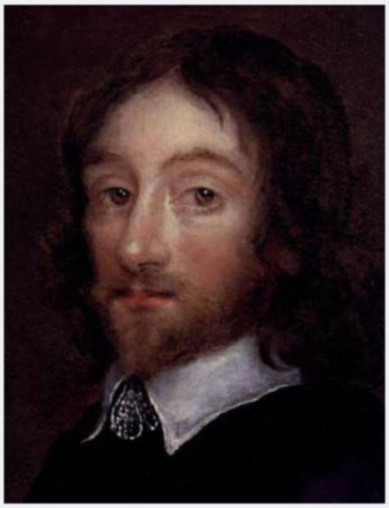
It should not be imagined that the marked pessimism which so characterised German philosophers of the 19th century and English poets of the 17th century has wholly evaporated. Among notable modern sufferers of *Weltschmerz* was the renowned German writer and academic WG Sebald (1941-2001) as demonstrated in his *Rings of Saturn* (1995), a reflective book about his hike around East Suffolk in August 1992. Recovering from surgery in the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, he poured over the melancholic meditations of antique Norfolk divine and polymath Sir Thomas Browne (1599-1682) who penned *Urne Burial*, a treatise on antique cremation urns and the fate of human bones and ashes. He was gripped by the irony of the curious fate of Sir Thomas's own skull, once displayed as a relic in the same hospital in which Sebald found himself.

Strange to say, Sir Thomas, who in life considered that "to be gnawed out of our graves, have our skulls made drinking bowls and our bones turned into pipes, to delight and sport our enemies, are tragic abominations", suffered just such posthumous indignity. In 1841 his skull was accidentally disinterred at St Peter Mancroft's Church, Norwich, and removed, spending the next 80 years preserved under a glass bell jar in a museum at the same Norfolk and Norwich Hospital.

Prior to his surgery, Sebald had set off on what initially was a carefree walk in neighbouring Suffolk; but despite walking through some of the gentlest countryside in the British Isles, he soon found things to lower his spirits, reminiscent of the English poet Matthew Arnold sensing the "turbid ebb and flow of human misery" in 'Dover Beach' in 1867. Inspired by odd relics, chance discoveries and newspaper cuttings, Sebald forged mental links between tranquil Suffolk and the massive casualties and body counts in faraway disasters, wars and atrocities of the 19th century and 20th centuries. These included the estimated seven to 20 million people who perished in the Chinese famine of 1873-1876, the 700,000 Serbs, Jews and Bosnians massacred by Croat militias and the Wermacht during World War II and appalling brutalities inflicted upon natives in Belgian Congo before World War I. These musings crystallised again in Sebald's mind in hospital as he thought about Sir Thomas.

With such a monumental sense of human mortality, Sebald would have been my ideal choice as the academic best qualified to analyse the meanings and symbolism to be drawn from the peculiarly British tradition of 'Screaming Skulls'. Unfortunately, Sebald died himself in a road accident in Norfolk in December 2001. However, both he and Sir Thomas do get a passing mention in a newly published scholarly analysis exploring the meanings of one such celebrated skull.





ABOVE LEFT: Writer W G Sebald.
ABOVE RIGHT: Sir Thomas Browne.

UEA

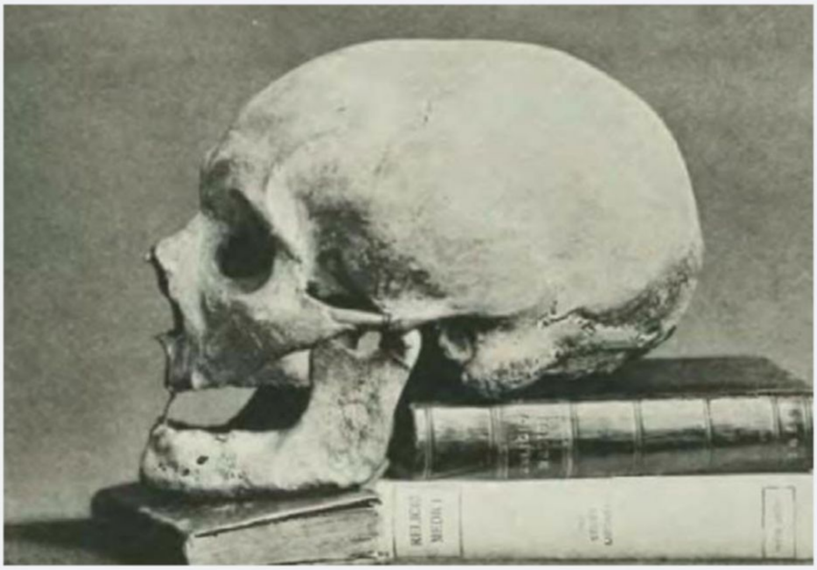
> Any attempt at disposal of the skull triggers ghostly disturbances, noises and racketing poltergeist activity

In *Calvariæ Disjecta* (meaning 'scattered fragments of the skull' in Latin), the German cultural historian Dr Hilmar Schäfer of the University of Frankfurt collaborates with Professor Robert Williams, University of Cumbria Fine Arts Department, in a unique foray into this interesting byway of UK ghostlore. Theirs is not a physical stroll but a scholarly mental journey into how one such tradition is transmitted in popular culture, their chosen example being one of Britain's best loved 'Screaming Skulls', that of 'Awd Nance' of Burton Agnes Hall near Driffield in Yorkshire.

It must be said that 'Screaming Skulls' are something that Britain does rather well, and in which our country can genuinely be considered a world leader. The notion has inspired literary collections of both allegedly factual as well as fictional tales, though boundaries become blurred, (e.g. *Screaming Skulls and other Ghosts* (1963) by Elliot O'Donnell, *The Screaming Skull and Other Ghosts* by F Marion Crawford; and the excellent *Fortean Studies* article surveying the tradition by David Clarke and Andrew Roberts that appeared in 1996 ('Heads and Tales: The Screaming Skull Legends of Britain', *Fortean Studies* #3, ed. Steve Moore). Indeed, these traditions are probably unique to England ("And just who would want to emulate them?" those of a sceptical vein might ask). But to my knowledge *Calvariæ Disjecta* is the first occasion an entire book has been devoted solely to the cataloguing of accounts concerning a single specimen and to unpicking its myths and potential cultural meanings. The selection of the Burton Agnes skull was governed by childhood exposure to the story on the part of Professor Williams rather than his later career. (*Calvariæ Disjecta: The Many Hauntings of Burton Agnes Hall* by Hilmar Schafer, Robert Williams, Kate Briggs and James Brook, 2017, available from www.informationasmaterial.org).

The basic story – which I first shuddered over as a boy in the early 1970s, and last regaled a coach of American ghost hunting tourists with as we swept past Burton Agnes Hall on a late night detour from York to Kingston Upon Hull in 2009 – is easy to relate. The skull known as 'Awd Nance' is reputedly that of a woman called Anne Griffith and has been kept at the hall for centuries. All versions of the story offer a dramatic sequence of events that result in her skull being preserved there. Back in the reign of Elizabeth I she was one of three Griffith sisters, either heirs or builders of Burton Agnes Hall. Anne the eldest was deeply attached to her home and committed to extending it. Walking alone one day away from the house, Anne is attacked by a robber (or robbers) and grievously injured. On being carried back to the house, dying from her injuries, she begs her sisters that after her last breath they must sever her head from her body and preserve it permanently inside the house. Of course, her sisters do no such thing, dismissing her request as the ravings of a dying woman. Anne is duly buried intact. The house is then disturbed by screams, shrieks and weird noises. Anne's grave is hastily re-opened to comply with her dying wish, with some versions averring that when the tomb is opened her head is already a fleshless skull and has already separated from her body in anticipation of its removal. Anne's skull is then taken back to the house, and peace returns. But woe betide anyone who tries to remove it thereafter. Any attempt at disposal triggers fresh ghostly disturbances, noises and racketing poltergeist activity. Strangers staying at the hall have also been visited by her noisy ghost, asserting her presence. The local familiar nicknames 'Awd Nance' or 'Awd Nance' do nothing to dispel the terror associated with her haunting.

Dr Hilmar and Professor Williams map out what they term "the many lives of this story", discovering it exists in a multiplicity of versions. 'Awd Nance', or at least the tale of her skull, turns out to have a remarkable vivacity as a cultural icon, dynamically inspiring retellings across generations. Over the years, the amount of detail accompanying each re-telling swings pendulum-like between those narrators seeing the legend as simply a short, grisly anecdote and other authors impelled to provide a full-blown narrative, expanded and embroidered with invented material to support belief in ghosts.



ABOVE: The skull of Sir Thomas Browne, accidentally disinterred in 1841 and photographed c. 1900.

In an exhaustive review, like following a radioactive isotope tracer, they plot its transmission through 100 popular versions and retellings spread over 135 years from 1880, in the first volume of *Folklore* in 1880, to *Horrid Henry's Ghosts: A Horrid Factbook* (2014) and versions appearing on the Internet in the 21st century.

Historic and pseudo-historic details vary accordingly, as do descriptions of the manifestations. The precise origin or authorship of the story cannot now be located, but a portrait of three sisters at the hall, one dressed in black, and a 'Dance of Death' panel both at the hall and alabaster skulls on a Griffith family tomb in the local church must have supplied inspiration. It seems an oral source began almost as an extended quotation, and then was developed and expanded in repeated instances of embellished plagiarism (few authors who retell it have ever journeyed to Burton Agnes Hall to make first hand enquiries).

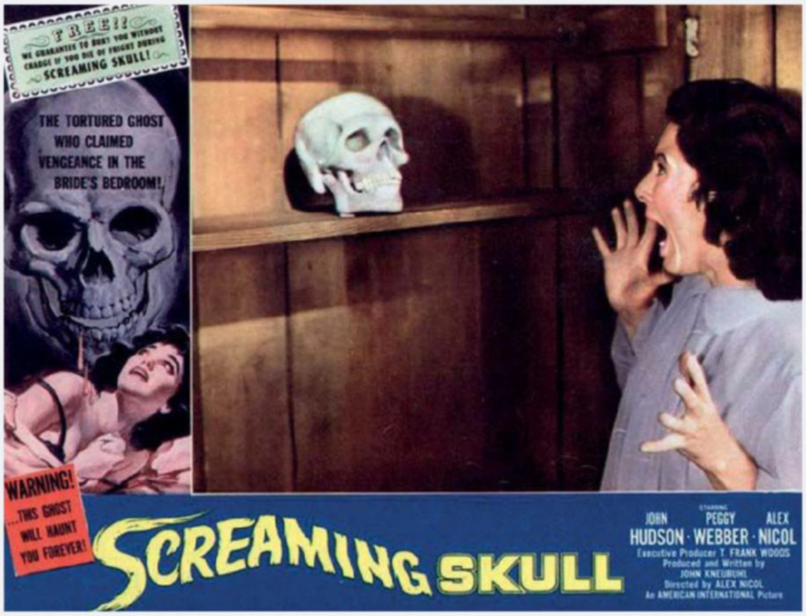
RICHARD NEEDHAM / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: Burton Agnes Hall in Yorkshire, home to one of Britain's best loved 'Screaming Skull' stories.

Over the years the story seems to have received several booster injections with claims of contemporary manifestations, particularly at the end of the Victorian era. Widely syndicated retellings occurring in the early 1890s concern a guest driven out of the house by unearthly nocturnal noises. In 1936 an account was published of a first-hand sighting in 1915 of a 'fawn lady' presumed to be Anne Griffith. This utterly mild and harmless apparition was included in Lord Halifax's *Ghost Book*. Then in 1953 the largely unreliable writer R Thurston Hopkins mentioned the story in his influential *Ghosts Over England* and did, for once, engage in a measure of local enquiry, finding belief in manifestations still current. Hopkins possessed the popular journalist's eye for sensation as well as a predilection for skulls, being the first to expressly attach Screaming Skull lore to 'Awd Nance'. But dubious as Hopkins may be in terms of accuracy, the subject matter obviously appealed to him and to many later and more credulous writers who accepted his accounts.

Whatever the case, the core elements – the three sisters, the fatal injury in a robbery, the flouted wishes of a dying woman to be decapitated and have skull preserved in the house, and the manifestations which follow until the skull is recovered and returned to the mansion – are constants. Ever-present is the implied, lingering threat that tampering with her skull could cause a resumption of ghostly activity.

Throughout their novel study of the process of transmission, the authors of *Calvariæ Disjecta* adopt an academically safe and fixed fence-sitting attitude as to whether paranormal manifestations of any sort actually occur. Thus, neither Professor Williams nor his critical friend Dr Hilmar attempt to assess or corroborate the veracity of the paranormal aspects of the story, considering literal truth and inherent contradictions don't really matter when it comes to dissecting the legend. But in selecting 'Awd Nance' they have gone for a skull in the premier division of Screaming Skull stories, so inevitably the question will not go away. Other skulls in this league include those preserved at Bettiscombe House, Dorset, and at Chilton Cantelo, Somerset, along with a pair of skulls geographically closer to Professor Williams's seat of learning at Calgarth Hall in Cumbria.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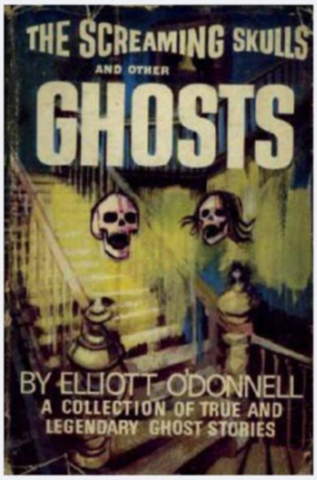
WE GUARANTEE TO BURY YOU WITHOUT CHARGE IF YOU DIE OF FRIGHT DURING SCREAMING SKULL!
THE TORTURED GHOST WHO CLAIMED VENGEANCE IN THE BRIDE'S BEDROOM!
WARNING! ...THIS GHOST WILL HAUNT YOU FOREVER!
SCREAMING SKULL
STARRING
JOHN HUDSON · PEGGY WEBBER · ALEX NICOL
Executive Producer T. FRANK WOODS
Produced and Written by JOHN KNEUBUHL
Directed by ALEX NICOL
An AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL Picture

ABOVE: The *Screaming Skull* title was too good to pass up for this 1958 low-budget horror.
BELOW: Ghost hunter Elliott O'Donnell's 1963 book.

They needn't worry. Anecdotal accounts of manifestations of screaming skulls over the years are largely derived from unverifiable hearsay; reliable first-hand and even second-hand testimony for any manifestations scarcely exists. One of the skulls from Warbleton Priory, Sussex – another promoted by Thurston Hopkins – supposedly 'yelped' at a 13-year-old boy when exposed in Brighton antique shop during Christmas 1953 (see *Haunted Brighton*, 2008, by Alan Murdie citing *Reynolds's News,* 27 Dec 1953). But even presuming any manifestations ever occurred at the sites in question, their occurrence might be wholly unrelated to the actual presence of any skull.


THE SCREAMING SKULLS AND OTHER GHOSTS
BY ELLIOTT O'DONNELL
A COLLECTION OF TRUE AND LEGENDARY GHOST STORIES

However, what there can be no doubt over is the sheer longevity of such stories and the fact they still have a powerful resonance. *Calvariæ Disjecta* also carries numerous illustrations of skull motifs in different cultural forms. A short article, 'Stories in the Air' by Kate Briggs, also raises the uniformity and repetition of such stories, "How air is air across history and how pockets of it get charged with stories which hang for a time over specific people and places, before dispersing and gathering again."

Doubtless the alliteration inherent in the term 'Screaming Skull' in English has helped promulgate it for over a century and the relative stability of the locations has given them a longer 'half-life' than ghost and murder stories in more urban settings where, as Jan Bondeson in his Murder Houses of London series has observed, collective memories are much shorter. But it does not explain how such stories actually started or why, ultimately, they prove so enduring, for belief in the power of Screaming Skulls is not wholly extinct. With one example (which will remain nameless for obvious reasons), I am told that no one is prepared to put to the test the superstition (probably modern) that "if you take it out of the house you will die within one year".

More generally, even the mere particle of a ghost story can prove immensely durable, especially if committed to writing. A good example is a fragmentary ghost story concerning Horseheath in Cambridgeshire about which the village website www.wereallneighbours.co.uk received an enquiry in 2014. In 1973, Anthony Hippesley Coxe in his *Haunted Britain* wrote of Money Lane in the village being "haunted by one who hid his gold here". People venturing into the lane at full moon may hear a voice "saying, 'Pick up your spade and follow me'. But no one has ever dared. Might he not be going to dig his own grave?"

This quotation appeared on the cover of the softback edition of *Haunted Britain*, exemplifying the entries within, accompanied by a symbol of a spade and a skull. This dustjacket repetition helped disperse the story far beyond the author's own source, *Cambridgeshire Customs and Folklore* (1969) by Enid Porter, curator of the Cambridge Folk Museum. And whence did Enid Porter obtain it? Her source was undoubtedly manuscript notes compiled by a Cambridge academic, John Saltmarsh, the driving force in the short-lived Eastern Counties Folklore Society of 1936-39 preserved in Cambridge University Library. And where did Saltmarsh learn it? There the trail goes cold, but recently a local website has linked it with the discovery of Roman coins in the area in 1854.

There are many thousands of such fragments in circulation, many just snippets, but destined to be recycled now and again in the future, as with 'Awd Nance' at Burton Agnes Hall, a story still being related by guides at the house. As the now forgotten Manchester psychical researcher David Cohen (1915-1966) summed it up in the title of his 1965 book, *Poltergeists and hauntings are with us forever*.

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RUSSIAN ROUND-UP

Miraculous weeping Tsar, Devil-worshipping ex-cop turned necromancer and a weaponised giant squid

MAX VETROV / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Natalya Poklonskaya carries an icon of Tsar Nicholas II in the Immortal Regiment march during the Victory Day celebrations in Simferopol, Crimea, on 9 May 2016. **BELOW**: The bronze bust in Simferopol that is said to have wept.

TSAR'S HOLY TEARS

Natalya Poklonskaya, 36, one of Crimea's deputies in Russia's State Duma, has claimed that a bronze bust of Tsar Nicholas II located in the annexed peninsula wept tears on the anniversary of the February revolution that deposed him. She made the claim on 3 March on Tsargrad TV, a channel financed by Konstantin Malofeyev, a wealthy Russian Orthodox believer and noted nationalist. She had been informed of the "miracle" by colleagues in Simferopol, Crimea, where she served as prosecutor under the Moscow-imposed government after the Ukrainian peninsula was annexed by Russia in 2014. They told her that people were bringing sick children to hold them against the bust in the hope of curing them. "This is a miracle that no scientists, no one, can explain," she said. "This is the 100th anniversary. You see how we are being helped, the sovereign is helping us. They [the Romanovs] died so that we could make Russia prosperous and great. And we are bound to do that."

Poklonskaya, a member of Putin's ruling United Russian Party, has repeatedly venerated Nicholas II in public and recently sought to ban a feature film due for release in the autumn that depicts the young prince's love affair with a beautiful, teenage ballerina before he ascended to the throne. Nicholas II and his family were canonised by the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000. Although some pro-Kremlin, albeit bemused, observers offered support following Poklonskaya's comment, a special commission sent by the Russian Orthodox Church to investigate found no trace of tears either on the bust or on icons in a chapel next to the bust, but asked to be informed immediately if there were new signs of it happening. Bishop Pankraty, head of the commission on canonisation of the Russian Orthodox Church, said: "We should follow the wise advice of the Apostolic Fathers: do not accept, but do not deny" – a policy adopted by the Roman Church towards the Turin Shroud.

A commission was sent by the Orthodox Church to investigate

Online, the mood was more playful. A volley of social-network users suddenly reported seeing holy tears rolling down the cheeks of Lenin statues; a bust of Stalin wept blood, and the nose of Marshall Zhukov's mounted horse near Red Square began dripping snot. One claimed smoke had emanated from a picture of Bob Marley.

The bust of Nicholas II is located beside a chapel dedicated to the Tsar and his family and was opened by Poklonskaya last October. The independent, investigative newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* went to the scene of the purported miracle on 4 March and interviewed a man called Aleksei who oversees the chapel, who gave a confused account. He said the incident happened on 3 March and had been first noticed by Poklonskaya herself. He grew tense when asked by the newspaper's correspondent how she had been able to notice it first, considering she was in Moscow at the time. Aleksei retorted: "Natalya Vladimirovna felt it. You didn't. Not everyone is ready to feel divine grace." *Radio Free Europe, 6+7 Mar 2017.*

PUTIN'S DEADLY SQUID

As part of an ongoing scare campaign, Vladimir Putin has been accused in the West of weaponising just about everything, but the latest claim wins the prize by any yardstick. "Dr Anton Padalka" claims he was part of a Russian scientific expedition to a subterranean lake in the Arctic that discovered "Organism 46-B", a giant 14-legged squid that can hypnotise its prey and paralyse humans using poisonous venom. He further claims the discovery was covered up by Russian officials who are now looking at ways to weaponise and breed the fearsome critter.

"We encountered Organism 46-B on our first day," said Padalka. "It disabled our radio – which, we later learned to our alarm, was intentional. It is also able to paralyse prey from a distance of up to 150 feet [37m] by releasing its venom into the water. Tragically, my colleague and lifelong friend was killed this way. He trod water wearing a blissful smile as the organism approached him. We watched helplessly as it used its arms to tear off his head, then popped it in its mouth. It was as if it had hypnotised him telepathically."

The 33ft (10m) foot-long man-

MIKHAIL KLIMENTYEV / AFP/ GETTYIMAGES

eater also boasts extraordinary camouflage – including shape-shifting – that helped it stalk the researchers. "The shapeshifting capabilities of organism 46-B sound almost diabolical," said Padalka (no kidding). "It shaped itself into the form of a human diver. We thought it was one of my colleagues swimming towards us in scuba gear. By the time the closest scientist has realised what it was it had grabbed him and torn him to bits."

Padalka said that Organism 46-B also uses its tentacles to kill, even after they have been hacked off its body. Another of his colleagues was killed by a tentacle many hours after it had been amputated with an axe. "Later that night it slithered across the ice bank and strangled her," he said. After five days battling the animal, the remaining scientists finally trapped Organism 46-B in a tank, which must have involved a herculean struggle, maybe involving psychotronic weaponry. They brought it to the surface but were shocked when it was seized by Russian officials, who told the waiting international press that nothing had been found. Padalka "fled the country" (Russia, presumably) and raised the alarm after he claimed to have discovered Putin's dastardly plans. Well, that's the story carried by the *Daily Express* (online) on 30 Nov 2016 under the byline 'Joey Millar'. Dr Anton Padalka has proved impossible to track down – could he be holed up in Atlantis?

BARMY ZOMBIE ARMY

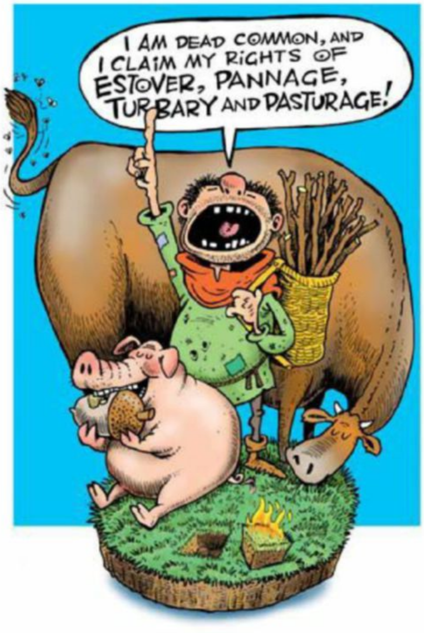
Meanwhile, a former police officer has been arrested and accused of killing four homeless people and attempting to turn them into zombie slaves. Investigators allege that Arsen Bairambekov used the promise of free alcohol to lure vagrants to a forest near Verkhnyaya Pyshma, a town 900 miles east of Moscow, where he sacrificed them on an improvised stone altar. Bairambekov is said to have buried the bodies before returning "some time later" to dig them up and perform occult rituals to revive them. An investigator reassured newspapers: "He tried to bring the dead back to life then turn them into zombies. However, all his attempts were futile." Mr Bairambekov had undergone psychiatric evaluations and was deemed fit to stand trial.

Times, D.Mail, 20 Feb; Sun, 28 Feb 2017.

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

211: YOUR COMMON


I AM DEAD COMMON, AND I CLAIM MY RIGHTS OF ESTOVER, PANNAGE, TURBARY AND PASTURAGE!

The myth

Who owns common land? Nobody does. Or else, we all do. It's common property – hence the name.

The "truth"

All common land is privately owned. It might be owned by an individual, a company, a charity, or a public body such as a local council, but it all has an owner. "Common" in this context refers, not to communal ownership, but to the historic rights of "commoners". And commoners (again, in this context) doesn't mean all of us. The "rights of common", most of them dating from centuries ago, are rights held in perpetuity by specific groups of people to use particular pieces of private land for named purposes. In other words, rights to common land apply specifically to people who *don't* own the land. In the past, these rights were crucial to people's survival – rights like estover (taking firewood), pannage (letting your pigs feed on acorns), turbary (taking turf for fuel), and pasturage (grazing your cattle). Common land can be bought and sold in the normal way, but it remains common land – whoever buys it is bound by whatever rights of common are attached to it. It was not until the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2005 that common people who are not "commoners" gained the default right to use all common land for a limited range of leisure activities, such as walking and climbing. But we still don't own it.

Sources

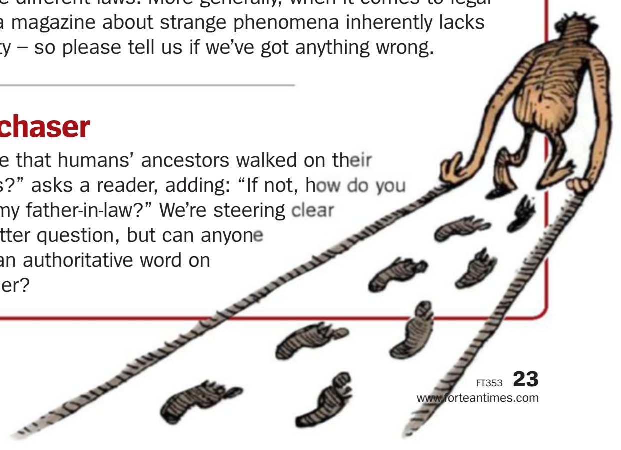
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/common-lands/; www.foundationforcommonland.org.uk/questions/ownership-of-common-land; www.gov.uk/guidance/managing-common-land; www.gov.uk/common-land-village-greens

Disclaimer

The above applies to England and Wales; other jurisdictions may have different laws. More generally, when it comes to legal advice, a magazine about strange phenomena inherently lacks infallibility – so please tell us if we've got anything wrong.

Mythchaser

"Is it true that humans' ancestors walked on their knuckles?" asks a reader, adding: "If not, how do you explain my father-in-law?" We're steering clear of the latter question, but can anyone give us an authoritative word on the former?



PLUMMET SURVIVALS

Falls from on high end in some very close shaves...

SIBERIAN TIMES

SUMMIT PLUMMETS

On 21 February, during a field trip in Nicaragua, Argentinean volcanologist Rodolfo Alvarez, 60, and his 25-year-old guide Adriac Valladares fell into the crater of Masaya Volcano, and had to be rescued by firemen using ropes and harnesses. The two men had been working just over the crater's lip when their rope broke and they slipped about 1,500ft (457m). Amazingly, they were unhurt, although they suffered dehydration from the high temperatures. Masaya Volcano, which is 2,083ft (635m) tall and features a lava lake, is a big draw for both scientists and tourists. The last lava flows were in the 17th century. *D.Mail, 23 Feb 2017.*

● Mountain climber Ryan Montoya, 23, from Paradise in California, survived two days in the snow after falling about 2,000ft (600m) from Pyramid Peak (14,000ft/4,270m) near Aspen, Colorado. He went missing on 5 March 2017 while climbing alone. His mother LaShawn said he was about 40ft (12m) from the summit when the ice he stepped on collapsed, sending him sliding down the east face of the mountain. Once he came to rest in a snowfield, he was unable to use his dislocated left elbow. He saw water, pulled out his shovel, and used it as a sled to slide down toward the water. He survived by making a snow cave with his good hand. He hunkered down overnight as winds howled around him. He had an emergency bivy sack (lightweight shelter) and enough fuel to heat snow and make water. On 6 March he stayed put because of the inclement weather, but that afternoon he moved along a creek to stay near water. Before nightfall he made another snow cave and stayed there that night. The next day he made his way along the stream to a road and walked along that until he saw a runner who alerted the search and rescue teams. Montoya suffered severe frostbite, a broken elbow, and a broken pelvis, but was very lucky to be alive after such a fall, which had even broken a chunk out of his helmet. *krcrtv.com (Redding, CA), 8 Mar 2017.*

> *Fortunately, he landed on the roof of a taxi parked next to the block*

● A 27-year-old hill walker from Kent plunged 500ft (150m) from an icy mountain ridge in the Lake District on 10 March 2016 and escaped with just a fractured ankle. The ridge on snow-capped Helvellyn was called Striding Edge. Stewart Armstrong, 59, died the previous June after a similar fall from the same spot while hiking with his son. Helvellyn (3,120ft/951m) is the third tallest English peak, behind Scafell Pike and Sca Fell. *D.Express, 12 Mar 2016.*

● A British teenager had a miraculous escape after plunging 1,640ft (500m) in the Alps while taking a selfie on 20 February 2015. The unnamed 14-year-old was on a school trip in the Molltaler Gletscher resort in Austria. He was part of a group who took a ski-lift to the top of the 10,242ft (3,122m) -high mountain Scharek. At the summit, they decided to take selfies. The boy stepped backwards while holding his phone, slipped and plummeted from the icy ledge. Rescuers found him lying on a ledge that had stopped his fall and saved his life. He was conscious and in shock, but had escaped with a few cuts and bruises. However, he was airlifted to hospital where he was kept in for observation. *Metro, D.Mirror, 24 Feb 2015.*

FORTUNATE FALLS

A 'lovestruck' teenager survived a 23-storey fall from a tower block as he tried to impress a girl. Alexander Shadrin (above), 16, climbed over a balcony rail to show off, but after clinging on for a few minutes he slipped and fell 230ft (70m). Fortunately, he landed on the roof of a taxi parked next to the apartment block in Novosibirsk, Siberia. Photographs (above) show him conscious but injured on the roof of the badly damaged vehicle. No one was in the taxi at the time. He remained in intensive care where his condition was said to be stable. *Metro, 28 Sept 2016.*

● A naked woman survived a 50ft (15m) fall from a block of flats in Yaroslavl, northwestern Russia, by landing in deep snow. The 43-year-old was found with a few broken bones after the five-storey fall. *Metro, 6 Mar 2017.*

● A British couple on holiday in Cape Town, South Africa, witnessed a man falling nine storeys onto the roof of their car on 19 November 2016. Jonathan Wosk, 42, landed on the white Mercedes after falling from the roof of the Clarensville apartment block overlooking the Atlantic in the suburb of Sea Point. The Mercedes was the only vehicle parked at the back of the building. Its roof was left caved in and bloodied by the impact, but when paramedics arrived Wosk refused medical attention and walked away. *Times, 21 Nov 2016.*

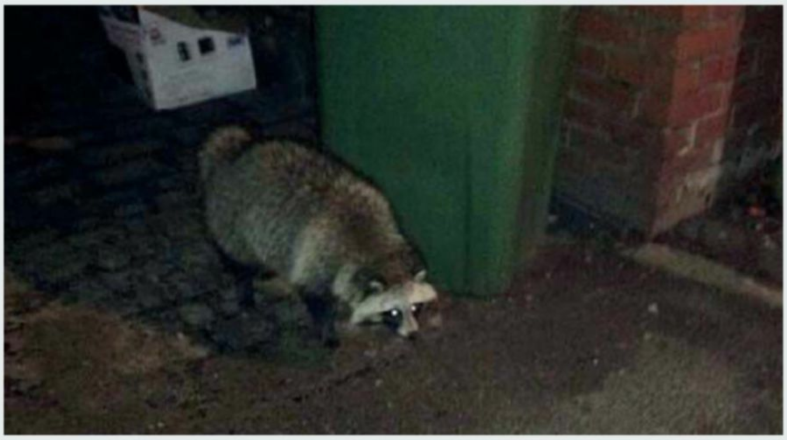
● Sebastián Reyes is lucky to be alive. The 23-year-old Chilean fell 17 storeys (around 130ft/40m) on 20 June 2015 after losing his balance on an apartment balcony in the Chilean city of Rancagua and toppling over the rail. Security cameras in the building recorded the moment he came crashing straight through the roof of a garage below. His fall was broken by a parked car, which absorbed some of the impact, saving his life. Amazingly, he only fractured his femur and pelvis. Despite losing consciousness, he suffered no head injuries. He was taken to hospital and was recovering in a wheelchair at he time of the news reports. When asked in a TV interview how he managed to survive, he showed a tattoo on his arm with the inscription: "God, don't abandon me." *D.Telegraph, Independent, 31 July 2015.*

● A 60-year-old woman fell 60ft (18m) from a balcony in a John Lewis store in Cheadle, Staffordshire, on 8 February 2016, but escaped serious injury by landing on a display bed. Witnesses heard screams after she fell over a glass balcony by the escalators. An air ambulance was sent, but the unnamed woman escaped with minor injuries to her hip and spine. At the time of the report, she was in stable condition in hospital. *D.Mail, 10 Feb 2016.*

● A girl aged four fell from the 11th storey of a building in China – then picked herself up and began to cry. The girl, called Liu Liu, was looking over the edge of her parents' low balcony when she lost her balance. Astonished neighbours in Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang province, described her hitting both a canopy and a tree before landing on a lawn. She had only minor injuries and was discharged from hospital the same day. *Metro, 8 Mar 2016.*

ALIEN ZOO NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF CRYPTOZOOLOGY

KARL SHUKER spies an odd Mancunian visitor and welcomes the UK's first black dormouse

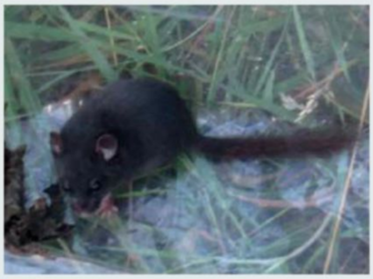


MERCURY PRESS / CATERS NEWS

DOGGONE, THAT'S NO RACCOON!

On 14 December 2016, I spotted a report in the *Daily Mail* concerning what was described as "a fat raccoon" spied scavenging by a wheelie waste bin in an alleyway in Levenshulme, Manchester, by teacher Nuala Burke while walking her dog one evening recently. As raccoons are not native to Britain (or anywhere else in Europe for that matter, being exclusively of New World origin), such a report was bound to attract my attention. But in this instance I was especially interested – because the animal (which was very tame) featuring in the report's accompanying photograph, snapped by Ms Burke while it was still by the wheelie bin, was not a raccoon at all. Instead it was something far more intriguing, and was therefore a much more unexpected sight to behold in a Manchester street. For although it shared the raccoon's familiar face mask, the mystery creature was indeed much fatter, or, to be more precise, much sturdier and much larger, than any raccoon – it was actually a raccoon dog *Nyctereutes procyonoides*.

Native to Asia (especially Japan, where it is called the tanuki and appears extensively in Japanese folklore), this unusual species of wild dog is named after its facial mask, but is not closely related taxonomically to true raccoons. It has become naturalised in Germany, Finland, and several other mainland European countries after having escaped from fur farms where it is commonly bred for its luxuriant fur, and was also deliberately released in Russia for hunting purposes, with its increasing numbers spreading across the continent nowadays posing a threat to certain native species. More recently, it has also become a popular exotic pet across Europe, including the UK, and it was evidently one such pet (hence its tameness) that had escaped and been unexpectedly encountered and photographed while roaming the streets in search of food. This correct identity for Manchester's mystery beast was soon aired in other media reports, and was added to the *Mail*'s own coverage in an online update, and I have since learnt of further raccoon dog encounters elsewhere in Britain. So it seems very likely that another unusual species will be making future appearances on the UK's OOP (out-of-place) animal list. *www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4028240/Are-raccoons-loose-Manchester-Teacher-stunned-spot-one-animals-emerging-alleyway-walking-dog.html 14 Dec 2016; www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/18/rspca-calls-ban-sale-raccoon-dogs-pose-threat-wildlife/ 18 Mar 2017*.



BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB / ROB GRIMMOND NEWS

A DARKER DORMOUSE

The first confirmed black dormouse in the UK has been recorded, aptly, in the Blackdown Hills on the border of Somerset and Devon. A team of staff and volunteers from a local wildlife group called the Blackdown Hills Natural Futures project made the unexpected discovery while monitoring a series of dormouse nest boxes set up there, which was officially verified by The People's Trust for Endangered Species. Although much darker in colour than normal, golden-brown individuals of its species, the common or hazel dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius*, this eye-catching specimen is not truly melanistic, because its underside is paler, and the insides of its ears are pink. Although currently known in Britain only from this single specimen, black dormice have previously been recorded from Germany, initially in 1972 and again in September 2016, and are the result of the expression of a mutant gene allele, most likely recessive. *www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/10/03/rare-black-dormouse-found-in-the-uk-for-the-first-time/ and www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-devon-37543326 3 Oct 2016.*

PINING NO LONGER FOR MISSING MARTENS

Once common over much of Great Britain, by the end of the 1800s hunting had drastically reduced the distribution of the pine marten *Martes martes* to a few highly fragmented populations, almost exclusively in Scotland (though it is now more common in England), having been wiped out in much of its former territory, especially in England. One region where this arboreal mustelid was long thought to have been lost is Shropshire – the last confirmed record was in 1893 – until some remarkable video footage recently obtained here suggested otherwise. In 2015, amateur wildlife recorder Dave Pearce snapped two photographs of a pine marten in a southwestern Shropshire wood, inciting great surprise and official interest in obtaining further, conclusive evidence for this highly elusive species' survival here. And in December 2016, news emerged that Stuart Edwards from the Shropshire Wildlife Trust had successfully videoed a pine marten there in daylight, with evidence obtained from sensor cameras of at least five individuals existing in this particular locality, fairly close to the border with Wales. Moreover, pine marten hair and fæcal samples have also been obtained here, from which DNA is to be extracted and examined in order to determine whether the martens are specimens that have been illegally introduced here or are genuine surviving Shropshire specimens.*Wolverhampton Express and Star, 15 Dec 2016.*

NECROLOG

This month, we say goodbye to the Catholic Church's best-known exorcist as well as the author who helped make demonic possession a pop-cultural phenomenon

GIULIO NAPOLITANO / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

FATHER GABRIELE AMORTH

As a teenager, Gabriele Amorth fought for the partisans in WWII before studying law. He entered the Society of St Paul in 1946 and was ordained in 1951. In 1986 he was appointed exorcist of the diocese of Rome, and in 1990 he co-founded the International Association of Exorcists, which he led until 2000. He became the Catholic Church's best-known and most controversial exorcist.

His book *An Exorcist Tells His Story* (1999) was a European bestseller. He claimed that Hitler and Stalin (and, more recently, Daesh) were possessed by the Devil, and railed against Harry Potter, claiming that JK Rowling's books encourage children to believe in black magic and wizardry. This raised few eyebrows, but there were protests in 2011 when he decreed that yoga was the Devil's work. However, this is more or less the official line: in 1999 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith who became Pope Benedict XVI, issued a document warning Catholics of the dangers of yoga, transcendental meditation and other "Eastern" practices on the ground that they could "degenerate into a cult of the body" that debases Christian prayer.

Some felt that Amorth's contention that the sex abuse scandals which engulfed the Church in recent years were proof that the Antichrist was waging war against the Holy See provided too easy a moral escape hatch for priestly abusers. The possessed person, Amorth argued, "isn't a bad person, only a suffering one". He claimed to have carried out between 70,000 and 160,000 exorcisms – often performing the rite several times with one person – and women, it seemed, were especially vulnerable. When in 1996 it was reported that of the 40 or so exorcisms carried out in Rome every week, around 80 per cent of the "possessed" were middle-aged, middle-class women, he explained that women were "more vulnerable because they are the ones who mostly go to see clairvoyants, mediums, card readers, attend séances and belong to satanic sects", speculating that "it could be that the Devil wants to use them to get at men like Eve did to Adam".

Amorth believed that people possessed by Satan tended to vomit pieces of iron and shards of glass, and had a collection of regurgitated bits and bobs – nails, keys, chains, plastic figurines – to prove it. During one session, he recalled, "the Devil told a woman that he would make her spit out a transistor radio, and lo and behold she started spitting out bits and pieces of a radio… Such things are rare, but they happen." He had seen possessed victims levitate, and he credited the horror film *The Exorcist* with giving a "substantially exact" representation of what it was like to be possessed by Satan.

Even those who dismiss exorcism as mumbo jumbo could see some value in Amorth's services. He claimed to have come across only about 100 cases of genuine possession; most of his clients were psychiatric cases, whom he refused to see unless they had seen a doctor first and whom he often treated in consultation with psychiatrists. "Most times there's no actual diabolical presence, and my job lies in suggesting [to] those that come to me to live a life of faith and prayer," he explained. "The hardest to cure are the victims of the most powerful spells. I remember some people who had been subjected to a spell in Brazil called macumba. I exorcised others who had been afflicted by African witch doctors."

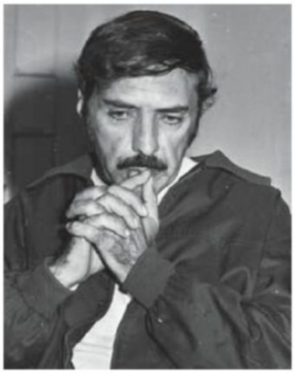
In recent years interest in and demand for exorcism has experienced a worldwide boom, leading the Vatican in 1998 to publish a new set of guidelines replacing a manual in use since 1624, and to increase the number of priests trained to tackle the phenomenon. In 2014 the International Association of Exorcists was officially recognised by the Vatican.

Father Gabriele Amorth, exorcist, born Modena, Italy 1 May 1925; died Rome 16 Sept 2016, aged 91.

WILLIAM PETER BLATTY

was born in New York, the youngest child of Lebanese immigrants. His father left home when he was six and his mother sold quince jelly on the streets of Manhattan. His childhood, he later recalled, was "comfortably destitute". He was educated at the Jesuit-run Brooklyn Preparatory School and at Georgetown University, where he studied English and in 1949 read about a local case of supposed demonic possession and exorcism of 'Roland Doe' in Cottage City, Maryland, which later inspired his most famous novel, *The Exorcist*. In "The haunted boy" [1999, **FT123:34-39**], Mark Opsasnick peels away elaborations of urban legend to reveal the unadorned story.

In 1961 Blatty won $10,000 on the TV quiz show *You Bet Your Life* (hosted by Groucho Marx), after which he gave up his day job to become a full-time writer. Three comic novels were not commercially successful; he also wrote several scripts with the director Blake Edwards, including the second instalment of the Pink



LARRY ELLIS / EXPRESS / GETTY IMAGES

Panther comedy series, *A Shot in the Dark* (1964), and *What Did You Do in the War, Daddy?* (1966).

The death of his mother and a renewed interest in his Catholicism drove Blatty in a new direction, and in the late 1960s he began work on *The Exorcist*, which was published in 1971. One critic called it "a pretentious, tasteless, abominably written redundant pastiche of superficial theology, comic-book psychology, Grade C movie dialogue and Grade Z scatology." It sold 13 million copies in the US alone, and Blatty turned it into an Oscar-winning screenplay released in December 1973. Directed by William (*The French Connection*) Friedkin and produced by Blatty, the film broke box office records and was nominated for 10 Academy Awards, winning two. Several publications have rated it as one of the best horror films in history and it continues to make a cultural impact with numerous spin-offs (see **FT313:30-35**).

The film opens with the discovery of a sinister statuette resembling the demon Pazuzu at an archæological dig in Iraq, filmed at the ancient city of Hatra (subsequently trashed by Daesh). It is forever associated with disturbing scenes of possession, including 360-degree head spins, obscene guttural blaspheming and the projectile vomiting of green slime. There were reports of fainting, heart attacks and miscarriages among those who had seen it, though Blatty was adamant that the story was redemptive. In 2000 he said the point of the film is "that God exists and the Universe itself will have a happy ending." Well, that's a relief.

William Peter Blatty, novelist and screenwriter, born New York 7 Jan 1928; died Bethesda, MD, 12 Jan 2017, aged 89.

FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

FAIRIES UNDER THREAT

The fairies of the mountains are much as we would expect. They have their human favourites, whom they help, and those that cross them do so at their peril. They are immortal, or at least very long-lived, although for some time there have been rumours that fairies are disappearing from the world. Their diet is made up of flower scents and milk. They can fly, though there is debate about whether they have wings or not. And, of course, they dress in old-fashioned, traditional clothes. The extraordinary thing about these particular fairies is that they are not from the Scottish Highlands or western Ireland, but the Hunza Valley in northern Pakistan.

The description above is, in fact, of the *periye*, a word that almost certainly derives from the Persian *peri*: *peri* was, often and erroneously in Victorian times, offered as the root of English 'fairy'. Of course, there are differences. The *periye* fly in groups on carpeted settees: not freestyle or on stalks of grass as do their British and Irish cousins. But much more striking are the similarities. What we seem to have in the Hunza Valley, in the early 21st century, is a belief in supernatural neighbours much as would have been found in Europe 500 or 1,000 years ago. What do we learn from this glimpse into the past-present? Well, that the inhabitants of the Hunza Valley have a full-blown culture of fairy magic, where individual mystics contract for power with fairy familiars. We catch glimpses of Irish cunning folk contracting with their fairies as late as the 19th century: but it is remarkable to see a region where many day-to-day problems are still solved by what the Irish used to call 'fairy doctors' (see **FT351:44**). The *daiyal* or fairy mystics are chosen by fairies at an early age and then guided through ceremonies until they seal a deal with a number of local *periye* who watch over them in their rituals. In our best study, Peter Nicolaus describes, for instance, an ecstatic dance which ends with a *daiyal* licking blood from a decapitated goat head, while his fairies look down from a nearby tree. Again we get glimpses of rituals and trances in our mediæval and early modern European records: but those brave or foolish enough to traffic with the fairies risked extreme censure or even death at the hands of the Church.

SINGLE GIRL FAIRIES ARE NO LONGER SEEN AS A MORE ISLAMIC CULTURE DISAPPROVES OF UNACCOMPANIED WOMEN

We must hope that the *daiyal* do not face a similar fate as their homelands experience Islam's counter-reformation. Depressingly, Nicolaus describes how single girl fairies are no longer seen as a new more Islamic culture disapproves of unaccompanied young women. There are also reports of religious wars between different fairy factions in Koh-e-Qaf, their secret realm hidden in the mountains…

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com

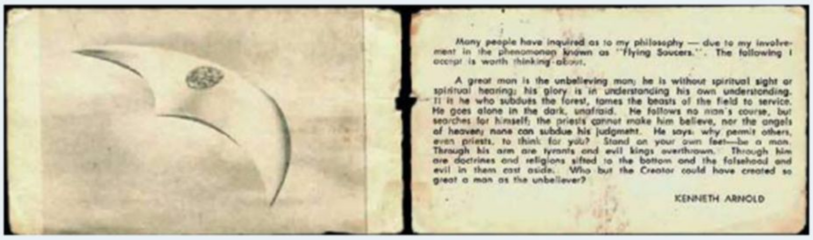
When philosophy meets hair oil

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

No, not snake oil. Or not exactly.

The 70th anniversary of the flying saucer as we know it inexorably approaches. Perhaps we shall be treated to a few more dissections of Kenneth Arnold's seminal sighting on 24 June 1947 (see **FT137:39**) – I mention the date in deference to those who do not have it branded like a slave-mark upon their brains – and in particular how the term 'flying saucer' really arose. In March, there was a discussion along these lines on the excellent EuroUFONet mailing list, but a couple of unexpected details emerged on its sidelines, which among other things throw an interesting light on Arnold's patron, the energetic Ray Palmer.

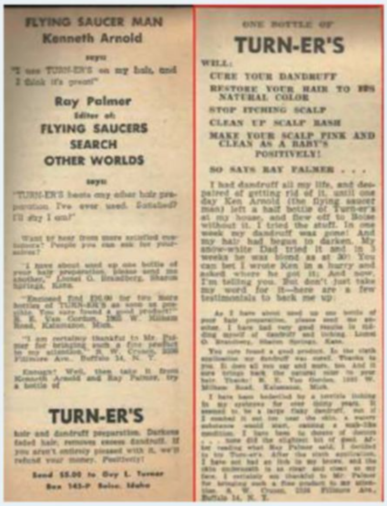
I call Palmer Arnold's patron advisedly. Having had his name and a version, at least, of his experience splashed across the nation's newspapers, Arnold had tried to interest mainstream magazines in his story, and got short shrift. He was understandably crestfallen, but found that Ray Palmer, publisher of *Amazing Stories* magazine, did take him seriously. One needs to note that because Palmer wrote to Arnold on his Venture Press notepaper, the latter had no idea that Palmer published pulp science fiction. And then came the Maury Island Incident, a hoax cooked up by Howard Dahl and Fred Crisman, who added a flying saucer dimension to their tale only because Palmer wondered too loudly if there were any connection between their account and Arnold's sighting. In best tabloid fashion, Palmer opportunistically commissioned Arnold – the most public face of saucery – to investigate, and Arnold arrived in Puget Sound in late July. Maury Island is a legend unto itself, which can be discreetly passed over here [especially as FT will be returning to the subject in an upcoming issue]. According to Pierre Lagrange, the net result was that, through Palmer, "Arnold little by little discovered the sci-fi, fortean [he began reading Charles Fort's work in 1948] and esoteric culture and he adapted what had happened to him to this new universe even if I think he was more friends with Palmer because Palmer took him seriously… Palmer had paid him 200 dollars to go to Tacoma. From that moment… he thought that he could trust Palmer, the only man who was ready to listen to him and to help him. He then heard about all sort of strange theories about UFOs and he may have seen articles about this sky animals theory (one paper about this idea was published in *Fate*)."



Many people have inquired as to my philosophy — due to my involvement in the phenomenon known as "Flying Saucers.". The following I accept is worth thinking about.

A great man is the unbelieving man; he is without spiritual sight or spiritual hearing; his glory is in understanding his own understanding. It is he who subdues the forest, tames the beasts of the field to service. He goes alone in the dark, unafraid. He follows no man's course, but searches for himself; the priests cannot make him believe, nor the angels of heaven; none can subdue his judgment. He says: why permit others, even priests, to think for you? Stand on your own feet—be a man. Through his arm are tyrants and evil kings overthrown. Through him are doctrines and religions sifted to the bottom and the falsehood and evil in them cast aside. Who but the Creator could have created so great a man as the unbeliever?

KENNETH ARNOLD



FLYING SAUCER MAN
Kenneth Arnold
says:
"I use TURN-ER'S on my hair, and I think it's great!"

Ray Palmer
Editor of:
FLYING SAUCERS
SEARCH
OTHER WORLDS
says:
"TURN-ER'S beats any other hair preparation I've ever used. Satisfied? I'll say I am!"

Want to hear from more satisfied customers? People you can ask for yourselves?

Enough? Well, then take it from Kenneth Arnold and Ray Palmer, try a bottle of

TURN-ER'S

hair and dandruff preparation. Darkens faded hair, removes excess dandruff. If you aren't entirely pleased with it, we'll refund your money. Positively!

Send $5.00 to Guy L. Turner
Box 143-P Boise, Idaho

ONE BOTTLE OF
TURN-ER'S
WILL:
CURE YOUR DANDRUFF
RESTORE YOUR HAIR TO ITS NATURAL COLOR
STOP ITCHING SCALP
CLEAN UP SCALP RASH
MAKE YOUR SCALP PINK AND CLEAN AS A BABY'S
POSITIVELY!

SO SAYS RAY PALMER . . .

I had dandruff all my life, and despaired of getting rid of it, until one day Ken Arnold (the flying saucer man) left a half bottle of Turn-er's at my house, and flew off to Boise without it. I tried the stuff. In one week my dandruff was gone! And my hair had begun to darken. My snow-white Dad tried it and in 3 weeks he was blond as at 30! You can bet I wrote Ken in a hurry and asked where he got it; And now, I'm telling you. But don't just take my word for it—here are a few testimonials to back me up:

ABOVE: One of Arnold's 'philosophy cards'.
LEFT: Ads for TURN-ER'S invoking the name of "Ken Arnold (the flying saucer man)".

Kenneth Arnold may not have known about Ray Palmer using his name in advertisements for a hair preparation

One of Palmer's stranger fascinations was with Dr John Ballou Newbrough's *Oahspe: A New Bible*, which Newbrough had received through automatic writing and was, said its blurb, "A New Bible in the Words of Jehovih and His Angel Ambassadors. A Sacred History of the Dominions of the Higher and Lower Heavens on the Earth for the Past Twenty-Four Thousand Years together with a Synopsis of the Cosmogony of the Universe; the Creation of Planets; the Creation of Man; the Unseen Worlds; the Labor and Glory of Gods and Goddesses in the Etherean Heavens; with the New Commandments of Jehovih to Man of the Present Day." This revelation was published in 1882. Ray Palmer published an edition of his own in 1960. How seriously Kenneth Arnold took *Oahspe*, or whether he even read the whole work, is open to question, but it is a curious fact that as he walked up and down in the world in later years, he would hand out a 'philosophy card', which featured an unacknowledged passage from *Oahspe*, no less.

One side had the well-known, highly stylised artist's rendition of the crescent-shaped UFO that Arnold saw. The passage from *Oahspe* on the other side reads: "A great man is the unbelieving man; he is without spiritual sight or spiritual hearing; his glory is in understanding his own understanding. It is he who subdues the forest, tames the beats of the field to service. He goes alone in the dark, unafraid. He follows no man's course, but searches for himself; the priests cannot make him believe, nor the angels of heaven; none can subdue his judgment. He says: why permit others, even priests, to think for you? Stand on your own feet – be a man. Through his arm are tyrants and evil kings overthrown. Through him are doctrines and religions sifted to the bottom and the falsehood and evil in them cast aside. Who but the Creator could have created so great a man as the unbeliever?" Could this be a prophetic vision of Donald Trump, do you think?

Arnold may or may not have known about Palmer using his name in advertisements to endorse a 'hair preparation' called TURN-ER'S, produced in Arnold's home town of Boise, Idaho, by one Gary L (*you guessed it*) Turner. According to one ad, Arnold left a half-full bottle of the stuff in Palmer's house; Palmer tried it, and it cured his life-long dandruff. Not only that, it restored the colour of Palmer's dad's "snow-white" locks to their original blond. Not bad for five bucks a bottle, eh? Maybe Donald Trump should try some.

Flying Saucers from Moos

JENNY RANDLES presents some close encounters that weren't quite what they appeared to be

On Sunday 12 March 2017 at about 2pm, residents of San Luis, Colombia, spotted a UFO crossing the sky and crashing to Earth. Understandably perturbed, they called the local police, who now faced a challenge somewhat different from the usual drug smugglers: the threat of an alien invasion. Of course, it was no such thing. A police spokesman said they "went to the place where the 'device' was found" and identified the "alien vehicle"; although by the time the law arrived, many locals, convinced the craft was from outer space, had taken metal panels apart and dismantled the remains. Souvenir hunters, not worried about alien viruses, commandeered whatever they could carry, mindful of what it might fetch on eBay.

It makes you wonder how a UFO crash would play out in the world of social media. Would the powers that be have any chance of covering it up before people stripped it for spare parts and posed for selfies with a baffled extraterrestrial? Area 51 is no match for Twitter and Facebook. That's a problem for another day, because on this occasion the 'crashed UFO' was soon identified as a Google high tech balloon sent into the upper atmosphere to enable remote regions to get Internet access – and to use the social media that allowed the speedy plundering of a 'UFO crash site'. Pondering the implications of this incident got me thinking about other cases where the public have reacted to a close encounter in not quite the expected manner.

One of the earliest I remember was in 1975 in a small rural area of Merseyside where a frightened witness, having seen a light in the sky, came face to face with its alien occupant – or rather that's what the witness, in the dark, assumed it to be. The thing was large and lumbering with big, staring eyes and made a faint noise that did not sound "quite human". The witness fled the scene to report his close encounter of the third kind. And it might well have stayed on record as such, but for some excellent retrospective investigation by the local UFO team, then part of NUFON (Northern UFO Network). They established quite convincingly that the light was probably just an aircraft and the alien was not from Mars, but rather moos. It was, in fact, a cow wandering free from a nearby field and with its eyes reflecting light.

Nor was this the strangest case in my UK database. That title goes to the minor pandemonium that broke out in a small Yorkshire market town one day not long after the events described above. A woman saw what she took to be an alien heading her way from a field on the far side of a shopping street. It was small, ugly and had what looked like rough skin or matted and muddy fur, and was, she observed, "clearly not of this Earth". Once she'd let out a scream it didn't take long for a few other people close by to witness this 'invasion', and with *Doctor Who* in its prime on UK TV, to fuel the rumour that 'ET' had landed. Chaos ensued, with people running away as the strange, muddy figure continued its march. It is probably only by chance that the explanation emerged before the case took on legendary proportions, as this was a real 'shaggy dog' story. The 'alien' was a performing dog trained to walk on its hind legs as part of a travelling fair and it had briefly escaped to practise its moves, heading off on tiptoe across a muddy field. The playful pup's adventure ended with 'take me to your lead': it was rounded up by a harassed trainer and transported to its next show. Most of those who witnessed the short-lived alien interruption of their weekly shop went home with a smile. But at least one of those who saw what happened fled before the denouement and chose not to talk about it with others, thinking he must have dreamt it or it would have been on the news. Only much later did we meet by chance; he shared his account and I was able to solve the mystery.

MARCO BERTORELLO / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

The alien was in fact a cow wandering free from a nearby field with its eyes reflecting light

Most of these cases of extreme, if understandable, over-reaction are not traumatic. But we should remember – as the case above illustrates – that not every witness gets to see the funny side or discover what it was that accidentally transformed their life. A case in point involved a 65-year-old woman and her daughter-in-law, then 30, who lived in Hastings, East Sussex. It was an evening in October 1981, just before 9pm, when the older lady "felt compelled" to look out of her window where a "large yellow object" was in view. She went outside, where she had a spectacular view of "two blobs of golden jelly" that were "wobbling and pulsating". As she watched, these changed shape into something like a cross. She telephoned her son, but he and his wife could see nothing from their home a short distance away; so the daughter-in-law came over to watch the object for a further half-hour. The UFO continued to change shape until 10pm, becoming "two golden dinner plates" or a "vertical cigar" and finally a "bright red disc" near the horizon. The two women even felt it had a "telepathic" link with them. They were certain it was an alien spaceship, and after it left they summoned the police. Two officers arrived and listened to them patiently and promised to be back if the case was recorded. They never returned, leaving the frustrated witnesses sure that the incident had been covered up by the authorities. Three years later, one of the women contacted me to report what she called the "miracle" over the garden. It had left quite a legacy for the witnesses. "Strange characters" appeared on top of the older woman's TV screen and she assumed a link with the aliens. Both she and her daughter-in-law suffered localised headaches over one eye for several weeks. Most worrying of all was that a few days after the sighting, the older witness collapsed on her bed and "blacked out" for 14 hours. A doctor was summoned, fearing a stroke, but she was given a clean bill of health; again, this episode was presumed to be caused by the UFO, and the pair even started to speculate about having being abducted and taken on board the craft without their knowledge.

Fortunately, one of our local investigation team, Philip Taylor, was a scientist who worked at the Royal Observatory. He quickly found the answer and produced a fine report to help me persuade these clearly sincere and distressed ladies that they had simply seen the Moon through changing levels of low cloud as it sank towards the horizon and became distorted. Otherwise, why had they not seen the Moon as well? Of course, by the time they had contacted me, the remarkable sight had become part of the folklore of their lives. Any attempt to resolve it was always going to be open to accusations of being just another part of the 'cover-up'. UFOs are more than just observations: they are social manifestations.

A Winged Malevolence

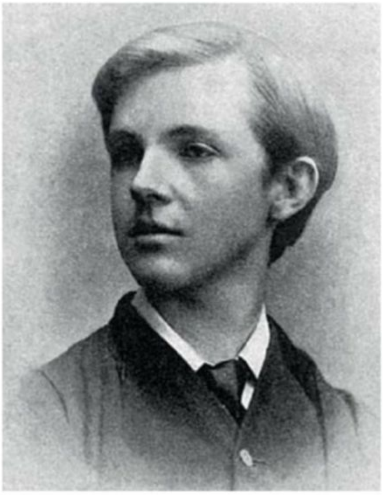
A young poet driven from his accursed lodgings by supernatural scratching sounds, two young barristers found clawed to death, and an anonymous investigation in the *Daily Mail*. **NINA ANTONIA** goes in search of the forgotten feathered fiend of Lincoln's Inn.

Beneath the bustle of city life, London's byways are steeped in secrets and mysteries. The capital's ghosts are particularly well catalogued, but 'The Bird of Lincoln's Inn' has long since fallen from favour despite being one of the strangest cases on record – one involving a haunted poet and a pair of violent, seemingly supernatural avian assaults at the same London address that reportedly left two people dead.

Perhaps the apparent lack of interest in these bizarre events has something to do with the paucity of available information, and the fact that the study of chimerical or folkloric entities – Nessie being the exception – is, generally speaking, a less popular pursuit than regular ghost hunting. The only other vaguely comparable relative of the Lincoln's Inn spook is Francis Bacon's spectral chicken, which is said to haunt Pond Square in Highgate, but bearing neither talons nor malice this avian spectre is far less sinister.

By default, the feathered fiend of Lincoln's Inn is usually referred to as a bird. However, when the *Daily Mail* first reported on the case in 1901, it noted only that it was *bird-like*, on account of the claw marks imprinted in the chalk dust left by the paper's shaken reporters. At least two deaths are directly associated with the entity, namely those of John Radlett and Charles Appleby, who were both young barristers. Furthermore, it was also believed that anyone who dwelt in the accursed chambers was doomed, as proved to be true in the case of the poet Lionel Johnson (pictured above), who first brought the story to the attention of the press.

CHRONICLE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



Claw marks were left imprinted in the chalk dust left by the paper's shaken reporters

THE DARK ANGEL

The exact address where these strange events took place – 8 New Square, Lincoln's Inn – has never previously been disclosed and was only discovered accidentally by the author whilst researching the life and death of Lionel Johnson. Although Johnson may be considered a minor poet, he is of some cultural significance: he influenced the work of WB Yeats and changed literary history when he introduced his pal Lord Alfred Douglas to Oscar Wilde. Prone to melancholia and an alcoholic, Johnson was later to regret bringing the two together, possibly because he had himself enjoyed a relationship with Lord Alfred. Rather unkindly, Wilde joked about Johnson's diminutive stature, asking if someone could "hail a passing perambulator" when Lionel needed a cab home after a particularly boozy night on the town.

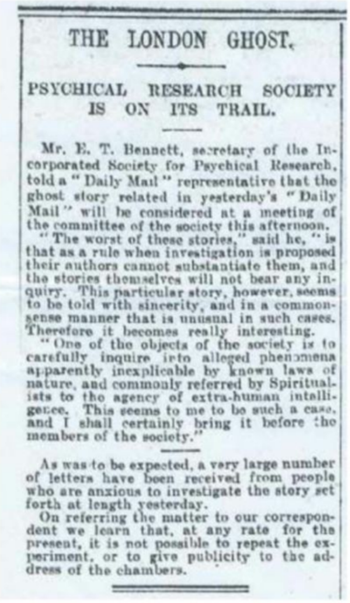
Johnson's biographer, Iain Fletcher, describes the poet during his time lodging at 8 New Square in 1899 as having "a haunted face". Ironically, six years before moving to Lincoln's Inn, Johnson penned his mostly widely known poem, 'The Dark Angel', which contains the following lines:

Thou art the whisper in the gloom
The hinting tone, the haunting laugh
Thou art the adorner of my tomb
The minstrel of mine epitaph

Was there an element of precognition in the poet's words? Undoubtedly, Johnson's winged chimera, be it angel, demon or bird, was a harbinger of evil. Certain birds are considered unlucky, and the entity at Lincoln's Inn appears to have alighted direct from the pages of Lewis Spence's classic book *The Encyclopaedia of The Occult*: "And the night was troubled by evil and ominous winds blowing from the Netherworld, heavy with the beating of innumerable wings of the birds of ill-omen presaging woe." Since time immemorial, birds, especially black ones, have been seen as death's couriers. Spence concurs: "The South Sea Islanders bury their dead in coffins shaped like a bird to bear away their spirits, whilst the natives of Borneo represent Tempon-Telon's Ship of the Dead as having the form of a bird. The Indian tribes of North-West America have rattles shaped like ravens… the probable significance is that the raven is to carry the disembodied soul to the region of the Sun." Edgar Allan Poe's poetic tale of the "Ghastly grim and ancient raven wandering from the nightly shore" was well known by the time the *Daily Mail* first broke the story in 1901, but by 1913 the winged entity of Lincoln's Inn wasn't just death's emissary but death itself.

In February of that year, Charles Appleby was found dead with large claw marks on his arms and neck, the door and windows

KEVIN WINTER / GETTY IMAGES / ETIENNE GILFILLAN



THE LONDON GHOST.

PSYCHICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY IS ON ITS TRAIL.

Mr. E. T. Bennett, secretary of the Incorporated Society for Psychical Research, told a "Daily Mail" representative that the ghost story related in yesterday's "Daily Mail" will be considered at a meeting of the committee of the society this afternoon.

"The worst of these stories," said he, "is that as a rule when investigation is proposed their authors cannot substantiate them, and the stories themselves will not bear any inquiry. This particular story, however, seems to be told with sincerity, and in a commonsense manner that is unusual in such cases. Therefore it becomes really interesting.

"One of the objects of the society is to carefully inquire into alleged phenomena apparently inexplicable by known laws of nature, and commonly referred by Spiritualists to the agency of extra-human intelligence. This seems to me to be such a case, and I shall certainly bring it before the members of the society."

As was to be expected, a very large number of letters have been received from people who are anxious to investigate the story set forth at length yesterday.

On referring the matter to our correspondent we learn that, at any rate for the present, it is not possible to repeat the experiment, or to give publicity to the address of the chambers.

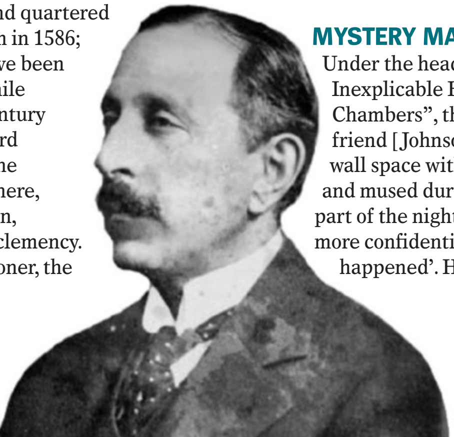
GENERAL PHOTOGRAPHIC AGENCY / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: The *Daily Mail* reported that the Society for Psychical Research was to 'consider' the case, although no investigation appears to have taken place. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Charles Dickens once noted the neighbourhood's peculiar fogginess. **BELOW:** Ralph Blumenfeld, author of the anonymous *Daily Mail* article of 1901.

apparently locked from the inside. Witnesses said that they had seen "a man fighting a shadowy bird-like creature". Both the victim and the winged assailant were described as being of about the same height. Although there were no eyewitnesses in the second attack, John Radlett's equally sorry demise appears to have been largely identical to that of Appleby, except for the scratch marks found upon the door. That both men were barristers has more to do with the location than the assailant, Lincoln's Inn having long been popular with those working in the legal profession.

The rooms were in a particularly desirable spot, yet the high turnover of lodgers suggests that something was not quite right. Charles Dickens, who had once worked there in a solicitor's office, commented upon a peculiar fogginess about the area, and his *Bleak House* features a sinister solicitor with a Lincoln's Inn practice. Rumours have long persisted that the square of Lincoln's Inn Fields was laid out by Inigo Jones to be exactly the size of the base of the Great Pyramid (although Walter Thornbury, in his *Old and New London*, debunked the idea in 1878, pointing out that "the fanciful idea is untrue, the Fields measuring 821 feet by 625, while the Great Pyramid covers a space of 764 feet square". Noble blood, too, had been spilled on Lincoln's Inns Fields, Lord Anthony Babington having been hanged, drawn and quartered on its leafy bosom in 1586; he was said to have been still conscious while eviscerated. A century later, William, Lord Russell went to the chopping block there, accused of treason, despite cries for clemency. Russell's executioner, the notoriously cack-handed Jack Ketch, would later apologise for his clumsiness in carrying out the sentence. Thus Lincoln's Inn was an ideal setting for a winged and vengeful elemental to roost.

Witnesses said that they had seen "a man fighting a shadowy bird-like creature"

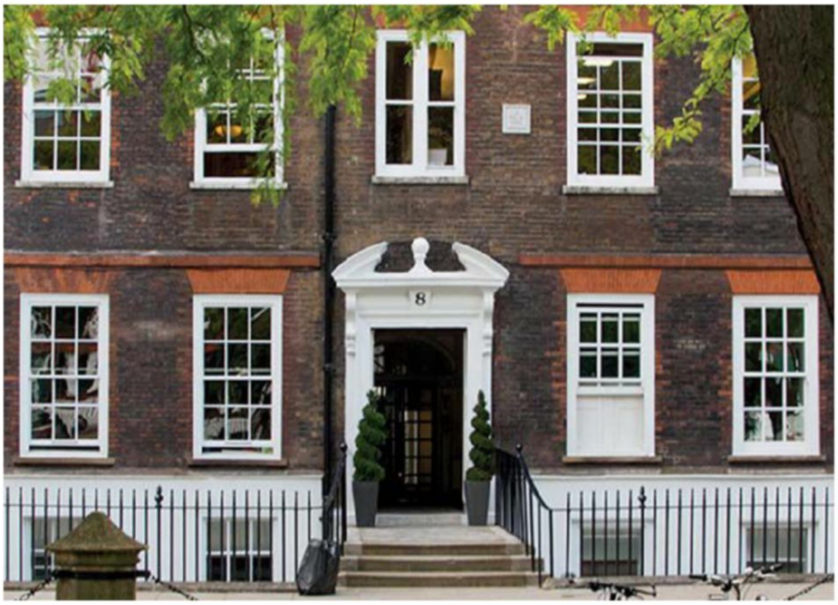


Given Johnson's keen interest in history and solitary nature, the neighbourhood's antiquity and privacy would have suited the increasingly withdrawn poet. As he would later confide, in anonymity, to the *Daily Mail*, the surprisingly low rent also appealed, securing him comfortable chambers on the third floor, which were accessible by a separate staircase and sealed off from the rest of the house by a solid door. At night, the building was empty save for a caretaker, who had a basement room. It was not until Johnson had fled the property, however, and the journalists had validated his bizarre claims, that the story broke on 16 May 1901.

MYSTERY MAN OF LETTERS

Under the headline "A London Ghost: Inexplicable Happenings In Old Chambers", the *Mail* reported: "My friend [Johnson] filled up most of the wall space with books; read, wrote and mused during most of the day and part of the night, and admitted in his more confidential moments that 'things happened'. He did not specify exactly what occurred, but after a time he became nervous and fidgety. Last month he left the chambers rather suddenly, declaring 'He could stand it no longer'. He cleared away all his belongings and once more the rooms were empty." The article also disclosed that: "There had been at least seven or eight tenants in two years. They had one and all left in a hurry, and the agents were anxious to let at almost any rent."

Throughout the article, Johnson is identified only as a 'man of letters'. However, the *Daily Mail* reporters didn't provide their names either, and thus "one of the major mysteries of the ghost-hunters' world" becomes stranger still. Further details emerged in 1960, when East Anglian bird enthusiast, ghost hunter and author James Wentworth Day reported on the story in *The Age*. He seems to have been the first to mention the deaths of Radlett (no date given) and Appleby, who he suggests perished on 25 February 1913. In 1966, a writer called Tony Parker revived and re-investigated the story, under the title "The Bird of Lincoln's Inn". Parker's article appeared in the popular anthology *50 Great Ghost Stories*, edited by John Canning and published by Odhams. It was Parker who revealed that the main author of the anonymous *Daily Mail* piece was the paper's very own news editor, Ralph D Blumenfeld. His accomplice was Max Pemberton, then editor of *Cassell's Magazine* and later a director of Northcliffe newspapers, knighted in 1928. Both were eminent journalists of good character who had befriended Lionel Johnson. However, the fact that the story went out with no known author ensured its falling into obscurity. As Tony Parker was to note: "When Blumenfeld finally did admit authorship, well over 20 years afterwards, he was adamant that the story as he had written it was true in every detail. 'I've heard a lot of ghost stories in



ABOVE: 8 New Square as it appears today. **BELOW:** In his account of the story in the 1966 book *50 Great Ghosts*, Tony Parker suggests that the Lincoln's Inn haunted house was long ago pulled down.

my life… and I've sent a lot of reporters out on assignments to haunted houses. I don't believe in ghosts one way or the other – but I do know that thing happened. We both heard what we heard, felt what we felt, and saw what we saw, but don't ask for an explanation.'" Parker didn't ask, and in his telling of the story he simply yet eloquently relayed the facts as given in the *Mail* report.

THE HAUNTED CHAMBERS

Except for two chairs and a table, the apartment was completely empty when Blumenfeld and Pemberton arrived shortly before midnight on Saturday, 11 May 1901. After locking the front door behind them, the two men carried out a thorough search of the premises. "There was absolutely no possibility of anyone being hidden anywhere in the rooms. There were no cupboards, no recesses, no dark corners, and no sliding panels. Even a beetle could not have escaped unobserved. The walls were entirely naked. There were no blinds or curtains." Having scattered chalk dust on the floors, the two men returned to the main room and seated themselves at the table. "We were both very wide-awake, entirely calm, self-possessed and sober, expectant and receptive but in no way excited or nervous." The room seemed a little brighter than it might usually have done, as is often the case in empty apartments. For close on an hour nothing untoward occurred until the handle of the door closest to them turned, as if someone or something was trying the latch. Ten minutes later, the door to their left swung wide open, as did the original door. Finding no resistance, the reporters closed the doors tight and resumed their watch but feeling less easy, the atmosphere having become tense. Blumenfield began noting the times of the occurrences, which took place with increasing rapidity: "At 1.40 both doors closed simultaneously of their own accord, swinging slowly and gently to about eight inches of the lock, when they slammed with a slight jar; and both latches clicked loudly." No matter how many times the men got up to close them, the doors would swing open once again, of their own accord. This continued for a further two hours. Whatever the presence was, it was clearly unabashed by company. At a quarter to three, the two reporters could stand it no longer, but it wasn't until they made ready to leave the apartment that they discovered claw marks in the chalk dust: "There were three toes and a short spur behind. The footprints converged diagonally towards the doors of the big room and each one was clearly and sharply defined. This broke up our sitting." Who knows what perils they might have faced had they stayed longer?

50
Great
GHOST
Stories
Edited by JOHN CANNING

Upon publication in the *Daily Mail*, the story raised considerable interest, garnering numerous enquiries and letters. The public wished to know the address but, for legal reasons, as the paper noted in a follow-up feature, it was not given. Perhaps, if the address had been made public knowledge rather than merely being alluded to when the paper ran the article, then Appleby and Radlett might have been spared their terrible fates.

However, the most significant response came from the Society for Psychical Research. The Society's secretary, Mr ET Bennett, contacted the paper, stating: "One of the objects of the Society is to carefully enquire into the alleged phenomena apparently inexplicable by known laws of nature and commonly referred by Spiritualists to the agency of extra-human intelligence. This seems to me to be such a case and I shall certainly bring it before the members of the Society." Unfortunately, it seems the SPR failed to follow through, and as Tony Parker notes in his 1966 recap this means there is a lack of further information regarding the case. However, though a writer of some repute, Parker failed to realise that 'The man of letters' referred to in the *Mail* feature was in fact Lionel Johnson. Johnson passed away on 4 October 1902, at the age of 35, succumbing to years of poor health. In some accounts, he is said to have died a drunkard's death after falling from a Fleet Street barstool; other sources note that he suffered a stroke and collapsed on the pavement outside.

Sadly, then, the next reference to the avian horror was to be found in Johnson's obituary, with the *Daily Mail* noting the deleterious effect of the accursed rooms upon all who stayed in them. Once again, the newspaper implored the SPR to act, but other than a passing mention in 1906, the story slipped from view until Wentworth Day and Tony Parker revived it in the 1960s.

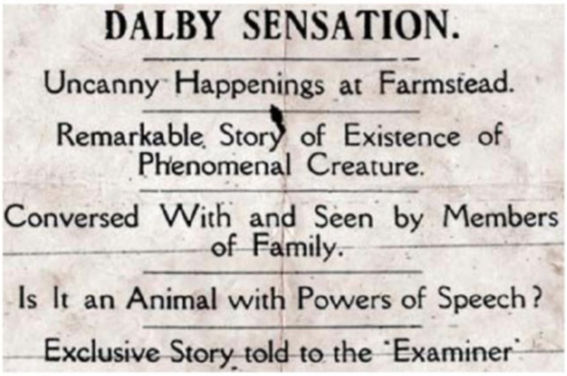
There's a further mystery, though. According to Tony Parker, when Ralph Blumenfeld eventually confessed to being the author of the 1901 *Daily Mail* report, some 20 years after the event, he was still remarkably cagey concerning the location of the haunted rooms, being prepared only to say that it was in Lincoln's Inn. "But he could – or would – give no more details than that: and anyway, he said, it would be impossible to find as the house had been pulled down after the First World War and another building erected on its site." Perhaps Blumenfeld was still trying to protect the identity and reputation of his old friend Lionel Johnson, and Parker didn't catch on. Blumenfeld reassured him that there had been no hauntings in the new building.

But the fact is that 8 New Square still stands, and while no further sightings of the winged and clawed entity have been reported, perhaps its evil presence lingers still. Whatever the truth, the story of the 'Bird of Lincoln's Inn' carries a spectral resonance that appealed to none other than the Reverend of the Supernatural, Montague Summers (see **FT349:42-46**). In his volume of memoirs, *The Galanty Show*, Summers recalled the case, being particularly sympathetic to Lionel Johnson… whose frail spectre he believed now haunted the area.

NINA ANTONIA is a music journalist who has written for Mojo, Uncut *and* Classic Rock. *Her first book* Johnny Thunders: In Cold Blood *(1987) is currently being adapted as a film directed by Jonas Akerlund. Her first love was always the supernatural, and her uncanny novel* The Greenwood Faun, *featuring Lionel Johnson, is due for publication this autumn. She can be found on Twitter @ninaantonia13.*

Mongooses of the Empire

Gef the Talking Mongoose, or the 'Dalby Spook', was at the centre of one of the strangest cases in the annals of forteana. More than 80 years later, this loquacious, stone-throwing entity, haunting a family in a remote farmhouse on the Isle of Man, remains as mysterious as ever. **CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE** attempts to shine some fresh light on this classic case.



DALBY SENSATION.

Uncanny Happenings at Farmstead.

Remarkable Story of Existence of Phenomenal Creature.

Conversed With and Seen by Members of Family.

Is It an Animal with Powers of Speech?

Exclusive Story told to the 'Examiner'

ABOVE: Gef first became a sensation in the local press before his fame spread far and wide. **FACING PAGE:** A yellow mongoose.

It may come as something of a surprise to learn that Gef the Talking Mongoose (see **FT269:32-40** for the full story) was initially known as Jack, and was a weasel. That is to say, when he first appeared to his Isle of Man hosts the Irving family, at their Doarlish Cashen farm in the autumn and winter of 1931, he self-identified as a "ghost in the form of a weasel". He was also referred to in early newspaper reports as, variously, "this eerie weasel" and "the little man-weasel".

Just how this original name of 'Jack' – chosen, apparently, by the Irvings – was replaced by 'Gef' was explained by psychic investigator and psychoanalyst Nandor Fodor. One day in early 1932, Mr Irving had encountered two boys in his fields, hunting rabbits with a ferret:

> *Thinking that the boys might do some damage and it may be as well to know their names, Mr Irving stopped them and asked them about it. One of them said that his name was Lowey. Mr Irving then asked him "Are you a relation of Jeff Lowey who used to work at my farm?" "He was my father," the boy answered.*

Arriving home, Mr Irving told his wife about the meeting. Gef, at the time, was called Jack. He apparently listened to the conversation, for a little while after he called out: "I don't like the name Jack. Call me Gef." [1]

Thus, the vexed question of how 'Gef' should be pronounced is solved. It's 'Jeff,' or 'Geoff;' the 'g' is soft; clearly, Gef's spelling was not as accomplished as were his talents for loquacious speaking, singing and swearing.

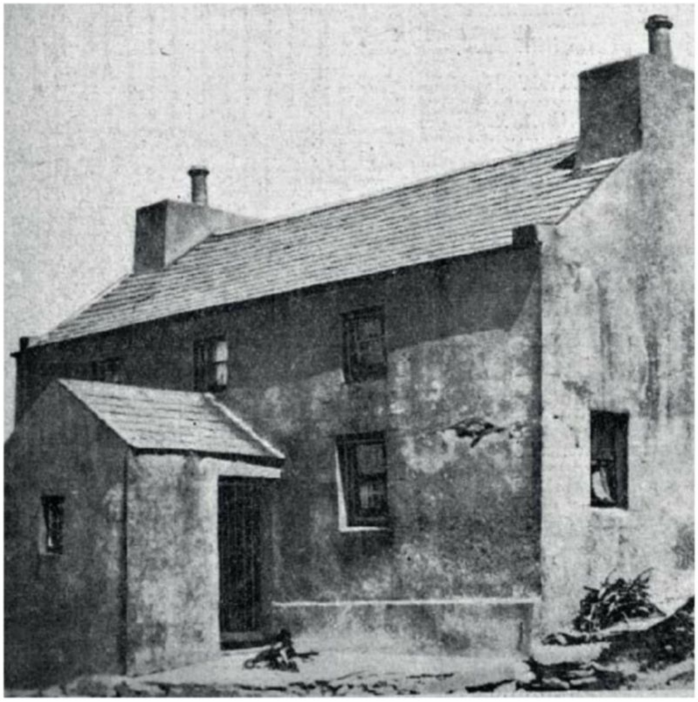
> *Gef was referred to in early reports as "this eerie weasel" and "the little man-weasel"*

WEASEL INTO MONGOOSE

The change of identity from weasel to mongoose appears to have been precipitated by a letter published in a local newspaper. Since Gef's (or Jack's) initial manifestations, the neighbourhood was buzzing with rumour and counter-rumour, with several locals claiming to have heard or even seen the little prodigy. As a result, the story was a live one for the Isle of Man press, whose offices tended to be located in the more industrialised and urbanised east of the Island. That the story had emerged from the parish of Patrick, in the southwest, only added to its currency. Rural, isolated Patrick was regarded as the last bastion of the Manx people, whose farmers and fishermen still maintained their traditional way of life and beliefs, and in some cases still spoke the Manx language.

In late February 1932, the *Isle of Man Weekly Times* presented to its readers

TONY HISGETT / CREATIVE COMMONS



ABOVE LEFT: The Irving farmhouse at Doarlish Cashen. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A photo of Gef sitting on a farm gate. **BELOW:** By early 1932, the Doarlish Cashen mystery was featuring in Manx and northern England newspapers. This clipping from the Isle of Man's *Ramsey Courier* of 4 March 1932 is one of the earliest in-print attestations of the name change from 'Jack' to 'Gef'.

the following letter, headed "Our Famous Spook" and written by Mr WA Teare, a retired engineer:

> *To the Editor,*
> *After reading your description of the animal called the "Dalby Spook", it seems to me very like a mongoose. These animals emit strange noises but I never heard of one being taught to speak.*
>
> *About 20 years ago, the then owner of Eary Cushlin, a mountain farm in the Dalby district, liberated a number of these animals to kill the rats, and it is quite possible that the "Spook" is a descendant of these.* [2]

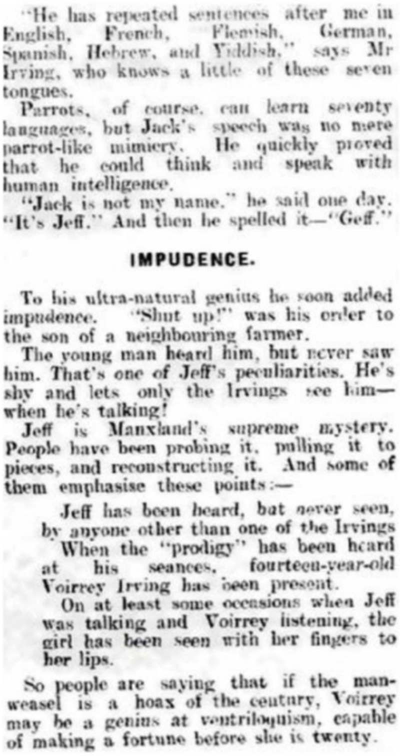
Little more than a week after the publication of this letter, another local newspaper, *Mona's Herald*, was describing their Island's exciting and mysterious beast as "half mongoose, half weasel":

> *It is with some feeling of trepidation I re-introduce what has become known far and wide as the "Dalby Spook", or the Talking Animal of Doolish Cashen but the testimony of two visitors, who state definitely they have heard and conversed with the strange animal – half mongoose, half weasel – is ample excuse.* [3]

The story was beginning to develop, and began fairly quickly to feature in British mainland papers: the Irvings' fantastic tale "had legs" – and a bushy tail.

But let us return to Mr Teare's letter, where he refers to the owner of Eary Cushlin farm having introduced mongooses into the local ecosystem. Eary Cushlin is, or was, a farm (with a sinister and ghostly reputation of its own) situated a few miles south of Doarlish Cashen. In 1912, its farmer – whose name was, curiously, Irvine – had imported a dozen mongooses in order to control the local rat and, quite possibly, rabbit populations, there being no resident foxes on the Isle of Man that might predate upon either. It was not uncommon for mongooses to be used in this way, as advertisements from the period attest.

"These animals emit the strangest noises but I never heard of one being taught to speak"



"He has repeated sentences after me in English, French, Flemish, German, Spanish, Hebrew, and Yiddish," says Mr Irving, who knows a little of these seven tongues.

Parrots, of course, can learn seventy languages, but Jack's speech was no mere parrot-like mimicry. He quickly proved that he could think and speak with human intelligence.

"Jack is not my name," he said one day. "It's Jeff." And then he spelled it—"Geff."

IMPUDENCE.

To his ultra-natural genius he soon added impudence. "Shut up!" was his order to the son of a neighbouring farmer.

The young man heard him, but never saw him. That's one of Jeff's peculiarities. He's shy and lets only the Irvings see him—when he's talking!

Jeff is Manxland's supreme mystery. People have been probing it, pulling it to pieces, and reconstructing it. And some of them emphasise these points:—

> Jeff has been heard, but never seen, by anyone other than one of the Irvings
>
> When the "prodigy" has been heard at his seances, fourteen-year-old Voirrey Irving has been present.
>
> On at least some occasions when Jeff was talking and Voirrey listening, the girl has been seen with her fingers to her lips.

So people are saying that if the man-weasel is a hoax of the century, Voirrey may be a genius at ventriloquism, capable of making a fortune before she is twenty.

Leaving aside Mr Teare's suggestion that Gef was a descendant of one of these Eary Cushlin Ur-mongooses, it is certainly possible that the original 12 had thrived, and were still in existence 20 years later when Gef made his first 'on stage' appearances at Doarlish Cashen. Although the Isle of Man may not seem a congenial habitat for an animal generally found in sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia, they are resourceful and adaptable mammals, with populations having been established on various islands, some in southern Europe (Croatia) and others in the Caribbean.[4]

In fact, there is some evidence to suggest that descendants of the original 'Eary Cushlin Twelve' are still around today. During researches for my *Gef! The Strange Tale of an Extra-Special Talking Mongoose* book, I spoke to a local man who was convinced that in 2007 he had seen a mongoose whilst driving one night through a location not far from Eary Cushlin. He seemed a level-headed and reliable witness, an outdoorsman familiar with the various fauna of the Isle of Man, none of which resembled the animal he had seen.[5]

Jenny Randles, a regular in these pages as an investigator and researcher of UFOs and other unexplained phenomena, recounts her own 2002 mongoose sighting (in approximately the same area) in her book *Supernatural Isle of Man*.[6]

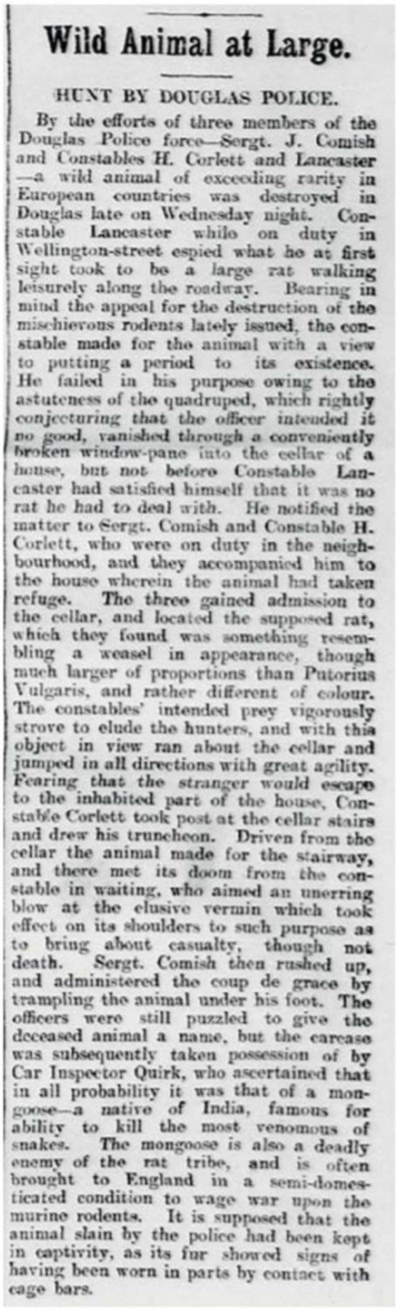
MONGOOSES OF OLD ENGLAND

It should be pointed out that the notion of a mongoose or mongooses at large in the British Isles was, in the first half of the 20th century, by no means as unfamiliar and outlandish as might appear to us today. Many Britons who had been posted abroad to one of the outposts of the Empire (the Indian subcontinent, an African country or one of the Caribbean islands) would have come into contact with these curious and intelligent animals, learning at first hand that they could – up to a point – be domesticated, and could prove useful allies in the fight against 'vermin'.

Broadly speaking, mongooses were viewed in a positive light, having benefitted from the excellent PR resulting from Kipling's portrayal of the plucky and loyal Rikki-Tikki-Tavi in his 1894 *The Jungle Book*. This loyal and courageous ally of his adopted human family is the sunnier side of Gef. Saki's Sredni Vashtarthe, a sinister polecat-ferret who demands obeisance and sacrifice, represents Gef's shadow side.[7]

It was also by no means unheard of, albeit somewhat unusual, for people to own mongooses as pets. One such example is given in Arthur Calder-Marshall's memoir of Oxford in the 1920s, *The Magic of My Youth*. He recounts a visit to his eccentric aunt Helen in Ship Street:

> *She opened a door into a large room. There was a noise of scuffling, and something long and thin and brown streaked past, pursued by something equally long and thin and brown. "You like mongooses, don't you?" she asked, or rather stated, because she waited for no answer.*
>
> *The only mongoose I had met previously had bit me deeply in the finger, and my opinion was that the sooner all mongooses were exported to places plagued with snakes and rats, the happier the world would be; an opinion which my experience with Auntie Helen's pair did nothing to modify.*[8]



Wild Animal at Large.

HUNT BY DOUGLAS POLICE.

By the efforts of three members of the Douglas Police force—Sergt. J. Comish and Constables H. Corlett and Lancaster—a wild animal of exceeding rarity in European countries was destroyed in Douglas late on Wednesday night. Constable Lancaster while on duty in Wellington-street espied what he at first sight took to be a large rat walking leisurely along the roadway. Bearing in mind the appeal for the destruction of the mischievous rodents lately issued, the constable made for the animal with a view to putting a period to its existence. He failed in his purpose owing to the astuteness of the quadruped, which rightly conjecturing that the officer intended it no good, vanished through a conveniently broken window-pane into the cellar of a house, but not before Constable Lancaster had satisfied himself that it was no rat he had to deal with. He notified the matter to Sergt. Comish and Constable H. Corlett, who were on duty in the neighbourhood, and they accompanied him to the house wherein the animal had taken refuge. The three gained admission to the cellar, and located the supposed rat, which they found was something resembling a weasel in appearance, though much larger of proportions than Putorius Vulgaris, and rather different of colour. The constables' intended prey vigorously strove to elude the hunters, and with this object in view ran about the cellar and jumped in all directions with great agility. Fearing that the stranger would escape to the inhabited part of the house, Constable Corlett took post at the cellar stairs and drew his truncheon. Driven from the cellar the animal made for the stairway, and there met its doom from the constable in waiting, who aimed an unerring blow at the elusive vermin which took effect on its shoulders to such purpose as to bring about casualty, though not death. Sergt. Comish then rushed up, and administered the coup de grace by trampling the animal under his foot. The officers were still puzzled to give the deceased animal a name, but the carcase was subsequently taken possession of by Car Inspector Quirk, who ascertained that in all probability it was that of a mongoose—a native of India, famous for ability to kill the most venomous of snakes. The mongoose is also a deadly enemy of the rat tribe, and is often brought to England in a semi-domesticated condition to wage war upon the murine rodents. It is supposed that the animal slain by the police had been kept in captivity, as its fur showed signs of having been worn in parts by contact with cage bars.

The animals were evidently well known for their rat- and snake-killing abilities. Nancy Mitford's father, David Freeman-Mitford, the 2nd Baron Redesdale, (otherwise, Lord Redesdale), was known to take a mongoose into work with him, in order to deal with the rats that infested the London offices of *The Lady* magazine, of which he was general manager. In Bram Stoker's novel *The Lair of the White Worm* (1911), hero Adam Salton employs a mongoose to hunt the black snakes that have mysteriously appeared on his estate.

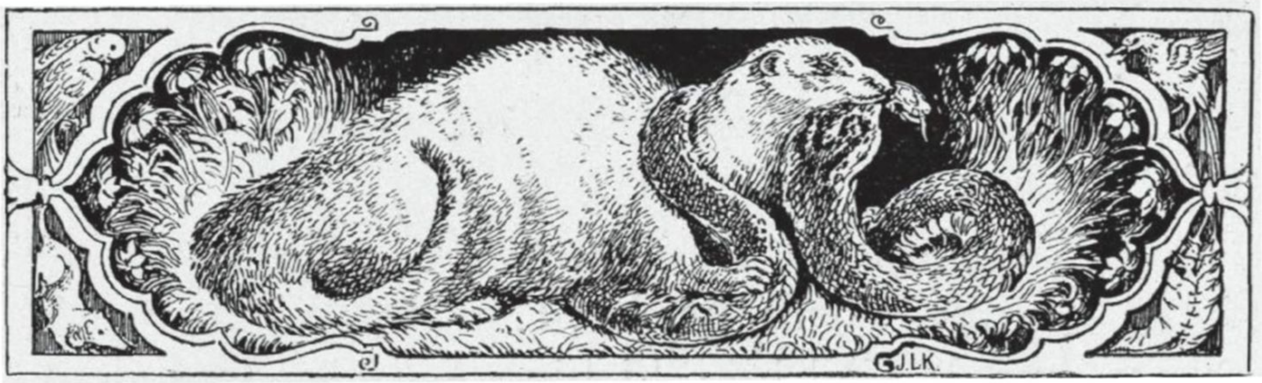
"I NEVER SAID THAT HE WAS A MONGOOSE"

WA Teare's "Our Famous Spook" letter seems to have been instrumental in Gef's change of identity from "a ghost in the form of a weasel" to "a little, extra clever mongoose", for if we are to believe James Irving, it was Gef, rather than he, who chose this new identification. Irving later told Nandor Fodor:

> *"I never said that he was a mongoose. Others suggested it. Then he himself stated that he was a marsh mongoose. I don't think he is an animal. I think he is a spirit in an animal form. He does not feed like a mongoose. We give him biscuits, chocolates and lean bacon. He always leaves the fat part…"* [9]

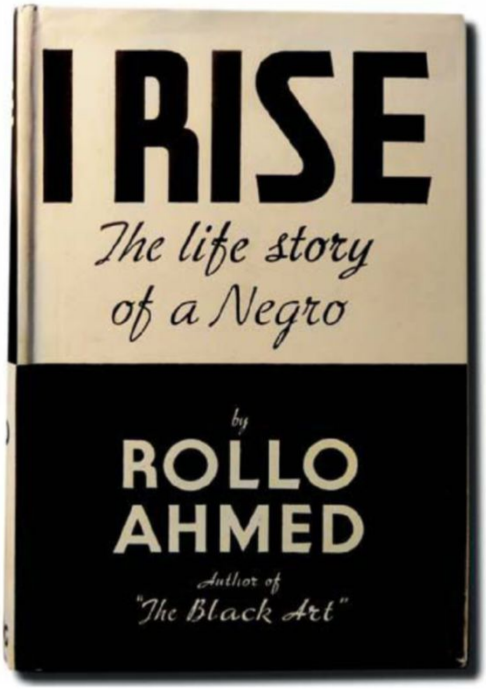
In a letter to Captain Harold Dennis (who visited the farmhouse on three occasions, as one of Harry Price's investigators), Irving appears to adopt a curiously contradictory position:

> *Undoubtedly, he is a species of*



FOTOSEARCH / GETTY IMAGES

TOP: Whilst not native to the Isle of Man, the mongoose was not a complete stranger to the Island's shores. The port of Douglas connected the Island to all corners of the British Empire, by way of Liverpool. It is not clear whether this story about a fugitive mongoose (*Isle of Man Examiner*, 6 Dec 1919) describes a stowaway or an escaped pet, but we do know that seven years earlier the owner of Eary Cushlin farm (only a few miles from Doarlish Cashen) had deliberately imported a dozen of the creatures for pest control purposes. **ABOVE:** Kipling's Rikki-Tikki-Tavi from an 1894 edition of *The Jungle Book*.



ABOVE LEFT: Rollo Ahmed's semi-autobiographical novel contains an account of owning a mongoose named Larry. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Ahmed was one of a number of occultists, spiritualists and psychic researchers who visited Doarlish Cashen during Gef's 1930s heyday.

> *mongoose, but whether a hybrid or not, I cannot say. He is light yellow in colour, long bushy tail, which is also light yellow, and the tail has a black or brown tuft of hair at the extreme end, and there are also, we think, 2 or 3 tufts of this brown or black hair on his back. This does not tally with the descriptions given of the mongoose in Gresham's encyclopædia and living where I am, it is difficult for me to obtain much information of the mongoose. His front feet resemble the human hand, and he appears to have 3 or 4 fingers and a thumb, and as he has taken hold of my fingers in his, I could tell that he possessed great strength, having due regard to the fact that he is only the size of a large rat.*[10]

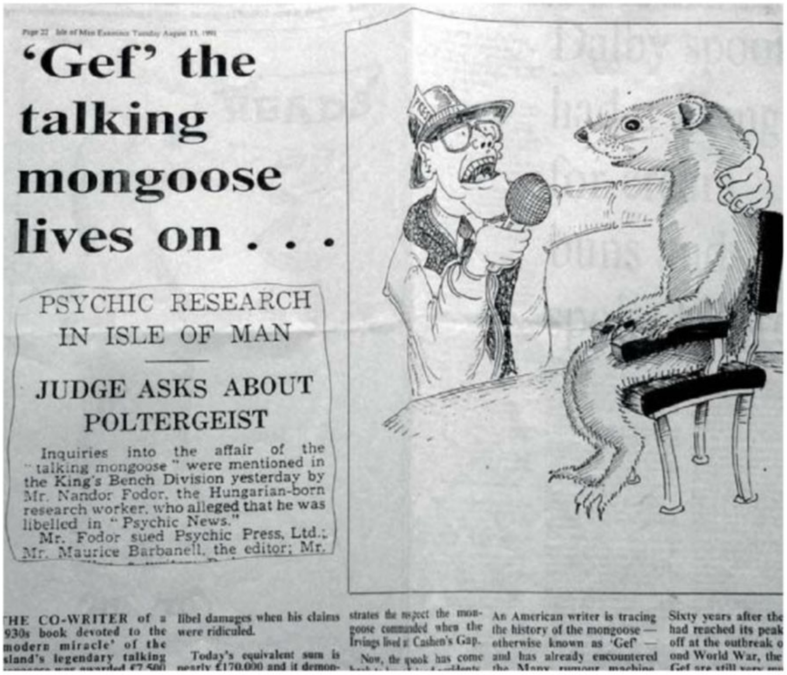
So Gef is "undoubtedly" a species of mongoose. But why? Because he said so himself? Or because of the attested presence of mongooses in the district, albeit 20 years earlier? However, his appearance does not match the descriptions of mongooses in the encyclopædia. Furthermore, Irving describes Gef's hands as being human-like, and remarks upon what great strength he had for one so small. Surely Irving must have had doubts that this was an ordinary 'animal'?

ROLLO AND LARRY

Another notable owner of a mongoose in the early 20th century was occultist, lecturer, yoga instructor, and man-about-town Rollo Ahmed (see **FT316:28-35, 317:42-47**). Friend to both Dennis Wheatley and Aleister Crowley (who described him as "the luckiest black man alive"), Ahmed, in his semi-autobiographical novel *I Rise: the Life Story of a Negro* (1937) recounts his childhood and youth in British Guiana. As a chauffeur, mechanic and general factotum, he was one of several servants who worked for a wealthy white family, the Lovegroves. One of the ladies of the house, a Miss Violet, promises to give the young Rollo ('Caleb Buller' in the novel) a cat or a dog, but instead offers him a mongoose. Caleb is not disappointed.

"When I got down on my hands and knees I could see its eyes gleaming in the darkness"

> *The mongoose became my constant companion, and, sleeping in my room, was stronger than any magic against lunar influences. Miss Violet bought him for me, and presented him one day when I was helping old Jacob in the garden…*
>
> *[S]he drove the car, and stopping mid-way up the drive called to me to: "Come and see." Casting down my hoe, I ran to her at once. She opened the door, and displayed on the seat beside her a wicker basket inside which a furry body could be just discerned.*
>
> *"It's a mongoose," she said, "for you. I thought you would find a cat rather dull, but this mongoose is very jolly and bright. Quite well trained, too. He can stay on the verandah, or perhaps in your room sometimes. Take the basket into the kitchen – I daresay he's a bit upset now. You see I didn't forget my promise."*
>
> *I think I scarcely thanked her, seizing the basket and carrying it off to the house. My heart was thumping with excitement. A mongoose! I had never even heard of such an animal before and wondered what it would be like.*
>
> *"What yo' got dere now?" demanded old Sarah as I entered. She was ironing, while Lottie, who sat by the table preparing vegetables, looked up with interest. I could always depend on Lottie.*
>
> *"Miss Violet's brought me a mongoose for a pet," I panted. "It's in here. Look, Lottie."*
>
> *Sarah put down her iron with a bang. "Well now! If the young lady ain't gone plumb crazy! I ain't goin' to stay in de house wid no mongoose! De very ideah!"*
>
> *"Oh, Sarah! Please! He's quite tame she says – look!"*
>
> *And I undid the fastening. Immediately the lid turned back the little animal struggled out, and like a streak of lightning dashed off the table and flew under the dresser. When I got down on my hands and knees I could see its eyes gleaming in the darkness but no persuasions and entreaties would make it come out. I was almost in tears.*
>
> *At length Jacob came in, and suggested that we should put a bowl of milk down for it and wait. We did this, but during tea-time I could not take my eyes off the dresser in case the mongoose should come out. Afterwards I had to help Jacob clear away from the lady's room, and when I had to leave the kitchen was terribly anxious lest it should appear in my absence. Of course it did. When I*



Page 22 Isle of Man Examiner Tuesday August 13, 1991

'Gef' the talking mongoose lives on . . .

PSYCHIC RESEARCH IN ISLE OF MAN

JUDGE ASKS ABOUT POLTERGEIST

Inquiries into the affair of the "talking mongoose" were mentioned in the King's Bench Division yesterday by Mr. Nandor Fodor, the Hungarian-born research worker, who alleged that he was libelled in "Psychic News."

Mr. Fodor sued Psychic Press, Ltd.; Mr. Maurice Barbanell, the editor; Mr.

HE CO-WRITER of a 930s book devoted to the modern miracle' of the sland's legendary talking

libel damages when his claims were ridiculed.

Today's equivalent sum is

strates the respect the mongoose commanded when the Irvings lived at Cashen's Gap.

Now, the spook has come

An American writer is tracing the history of the mongoose — otherwise known as 'Gef' — and has already encountered

Sixty years after the had reached its peak off at the outbreak o ond World War, the

THE DAY OF THE DRUIDS
KING ARTHUR GOES TO WAR WITH THE DAILY MAIL
WONDER WHISKERS
THE OCCULT MOUSTACHE UNCOVERED
CANNY CANINES
MORE THAN JUST MAN'S BEST FRIEND?
POLICEMAN PROBED
BRITISH BOBBY ABDUCTED BY ALIENS!
THE WORLD'S WEIRDEST NEWS STORIES
MAGNETIC PEOPLE • FINANCIAL CROP CIRCLES • GHOSTLY ART • THE IG NOBEL PRIZES
THE WORLD OF
STRANGE PHENOMENA
WWW.FORTEANTIMES.COM
ForteanTimes
Gef the Talking Mongoose
Meet the strangest media sensation of the 1930s!
PLUS
LONDON EARTHQUAKE
FLAT THAT TIME FORGOT
INVISIBLE TERRORS
CONTACTEES REVISITED
PHANTOM CAT
MANX
BBC

ABOVE LEFT: Gef, known on the Isle of Man as the 'Dalby Spook,' is fondly regarded as an exemplar of the Island's rich folklore. As such, the Manx press occasionally revisits the case. Here, for example, is a 1991 story in the *Isle of Man Examiner* from 13 August 1991. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Gef as the cover star of FT269 in December 2010.

> *returned, there it was drinking the milk, and afterwards it accepted overtures and caresses quite naturally, though it was timid of loud noises.*
>
> *For no particular reason I called it Larry, and thereafter it became my chief solace and companion, living on the verandah and coming into the kitchen whenever it felt inclined. At night Larry slept on my pillow.*
>
> *Old Sarah pretended to hate him, and always did lots of shooing and stamping when it crossed her path, but Larry cared not one jot. He danced in her way, with his fur charmingly ruffled and eyes sparkling with the fun of the thing: he knew he could always depend on her for food in my absence. He hunted hopefully for snakes about the grounds, but never found any to my knowledge, and soon became lazy from overfeeding.*[11]

Rollo Ahmed was amongst several occultists and spiritualists who visited Doarlish Cashen in the mid-1930s, hoping to meet and converse with Gef and perhaps to solve the mystery.

A black man, particularly an occultist, was something of a rarity on the Isle of Man in 1936. Here is how the *Isle of Man Weekly Times* reported his visit:

> *[A] picturesque figure, whose dark skin and black beard attracted much attention… Mr Rollo Ahmed, who specialises in the study of witchcraft and magic, and has written a book called 'The Black Art'… Mr Ahmed is an Egyptian, but spent most of his childhood in the West Indies. He has studied magic in South America, Burma, Asia, and elsewhere, and with his English wife, contributes to magazines in Europe and America. He speaks English excellently, and is obviously a man of education and erudition. He is visiting the Isle of Man to study the local traditions with regard to sorcery, and is also much interested in the story of the 'Dalby Spook'.*[12]

Ahmed was accompanied to the farmhouse by his wife Theodora, a spiritualist medium. A summoning was attempted. The combination of his widespread occult knowledge and her mediumship abilities resulted in some starting findings regarding the Gef mystery (which are detailed in my book).

One of Mrs Ahmed's observations noted the pronounced psychic atmosphere inside the house, which she compared to that of a séance room. This energy was so powerful that she felt at risk of involuntarily going "under control" – that is, descending into the trance state whereby a spirit takes over the medium's body.

It was Mrs Ahmed's belief, and that of other spiritualists who had investigated and commented on the case, that Gef was not simply a corporeal animal, but an earthbound spirit. Such an interpretation conflicts with the evidence supplied by the Irving family (and by other witnesses) that suggested Gef to be very much a physical being – one that ate biscuits, chocolates and lean bacon, drank, urinated, spat at unwelcome visitors, and coughed when he was ill.

Ghost in the form of a weasel, or extra clever mongoose? Spirit, or talking animal? This is the paradox and mystery of the Dalby Spook. One of several…

NOTES

[1] Nandor Fodor, 'My Diary in the House of the Talking Mongoose', 1-7 February 1937, Talking Mongoose file, Society for Psychical Research archive, p8.

[2] WA Teare, letter of 22 Feb 1932, "Our Famous Spook", *Isle of Man Weekly Times*, Saturday 27 Feb 1932.

[3] "The Dalby 'Spook' Again: Man Who Has Heard It Sing, Curse, and Dance (By Our Own Representative)", *Mona's Herald*, 8 Mar 1932, p5.

[4] The perennial calypso/mento/ska/reggae/soca standard 'Sly Mongoose' (its various versions having been recorded and sung by entertainers from Jamaica, Trinidad and elsewhere) attests to the ubiquitous presence of these clever, chicken-thieving mammals on numerous Caribbean islands.

[5] Email to authir, 13 Jan 2010.

[6] Jenny Randles, *Supernatural Isle of Man*, Robert Hale, 2006, p124–125.

[7] The short story 'Sredni Vashtar', written by Saki (Hector Hugh Munro) between 1900 and 1911, was first published in his *The Chronicles of Clovis* (1911).

[8] Arthur Calder-Marshall, *The Magic of My Youth*, Cardinal, 1990; first published, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1951, pp68–69.

[9] Nandor Fodor, 'My Diary in the House of the Talking Mongoose', 1-7 Feb 1937, Talking Mongoose file, Society for Psychical Research archive, Cambridge University Library, p22.

[10] James Irving to Captain Dennis, 30 Nov 1934, HPC 3F 2, Harry Price archive, Senate House Library.

[11] *I Rise: The Life Story of a Negro*, John Long, 1937, pp178-179.

[12] *Isle of Man Weekly Times*, 11 July 1936, p11.

CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE is the author of Gef! The Strange Tale of an Extra-Special Talking Mongoose*, which is now available from Strange Attractor Press: https://strangeattractor.greedbag.com/buy/gef/*

Saucer State

PAUL CORNELL describes how a lifelong love of *Fortean Times* and a youthful obsession with UFOs led to the creation of his latest comic – a highly anticipated follow-up to his earlier *Saucer Country* series – which explores both the evolution of UFO mythology and the shifting map of US politics in the age of Trump. Artwork by **RYAN KELLY.**

This story began with a single thought I had while reading *Fortean Times*: "What if a candidate for President of the United States was abducted by aliens?"

So was born Arcadia Alvarado, Democrat, daughter of a political family, descendent of illegal immigrants, and a canny, professional quick-thinking politician with both principles and guile. She was the heroine of *Saucer Country*, a 14-issue comic series created by artist Ryan Kelly and myself and published between 2012 and 2013 by Vertigo. The run finished before we'd completed our story, but at least we had the bittersweet consolation of a Hugo Award nomination.

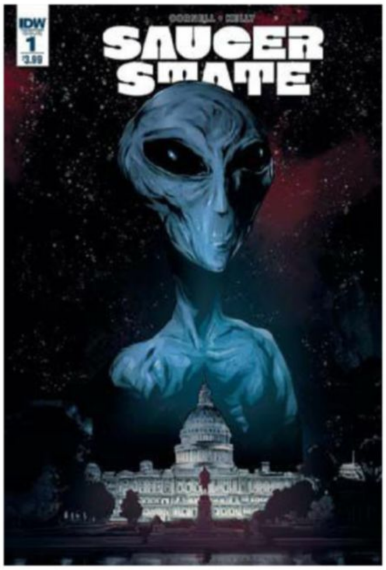
However, following the cancellation, the comic seemed to gain a lot more critical attention. Not a day went by without someone asking if it would return. Having got the rights back from Vertigo, I took it to Chris Ryall, the boss of IDW Comics, and a keen follower of fortean topics.

Saucer State, the sequel to *Saucer Country*, will be coming out from IDW starting this May. It'll take the form of two six-issue mini-series, and across them Ryan and I will be able to complete the story we originally set out to tell. (IDW will also be publishing the complete *Saucer Country* in one volume, so new readers can catch up – though *Saucer State* itself is new reader friendly.)

So what's this story of ours about? And why do I hope it's of particular interest to *FT* readers?

UNSEEN FORCES

Saucer Country begins when Arcadia takes her washed-up ex-husband Michael out for a drive. She's thinking of running for President, and wants to gently ask him to step out of the limelight, for fear he'll damage her campaign. The argument that ensues is interrupted by a bright light from above, and Arcadia and Michael are led from the car by… what?



Arcadia tells one of her team of advisors that she thinks she was abducted by aliens

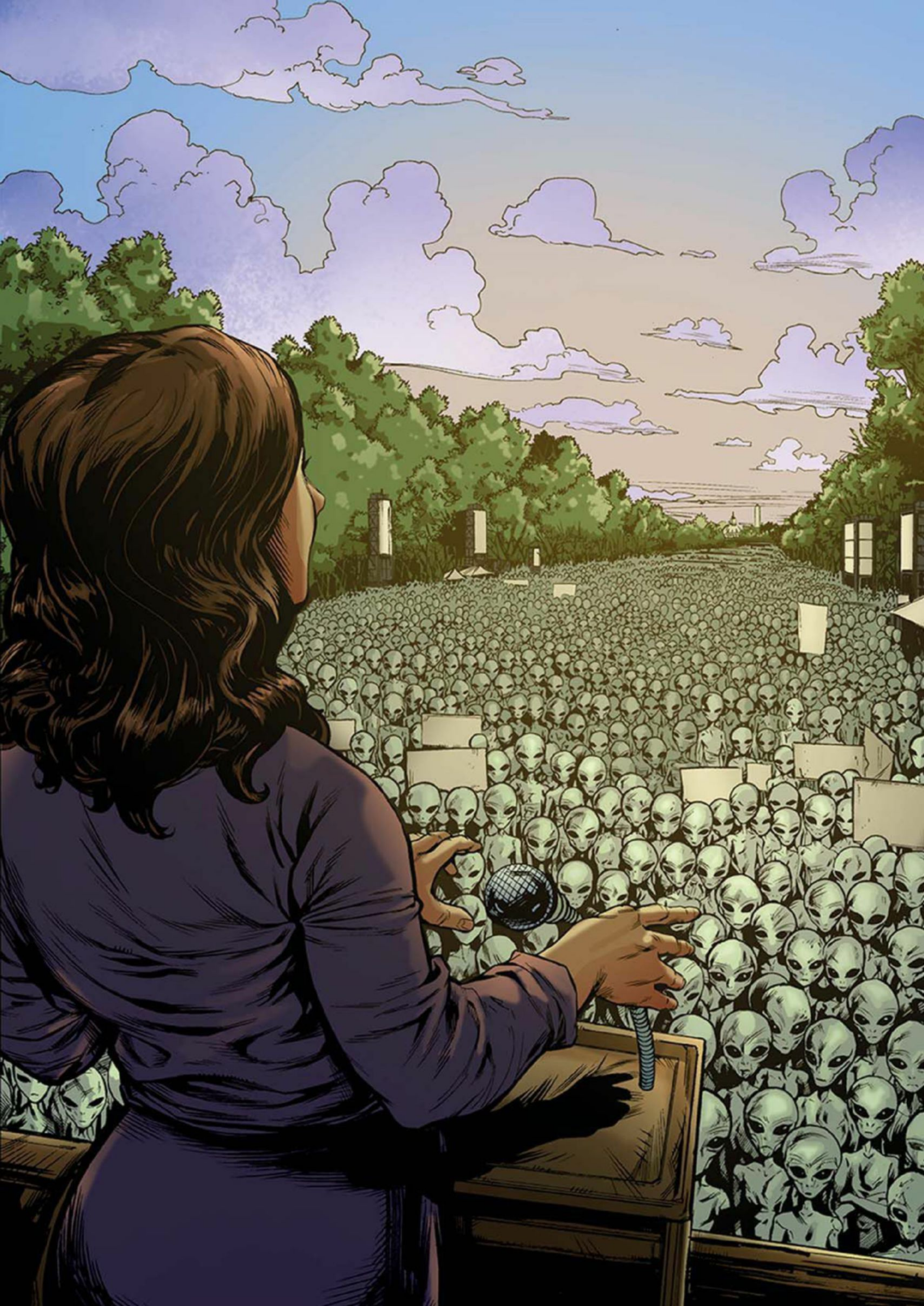
That question hangs over both runs of the comic. Arcadia remembers a 'grey alien' threatening what sounds to her like an invasion, a clear and present danger to the USA that only she knows about. Michael finds solace in hypnotic regression therapy, and has his genuine experiences, whatever they were, overwritten with a classic UFO narrative.

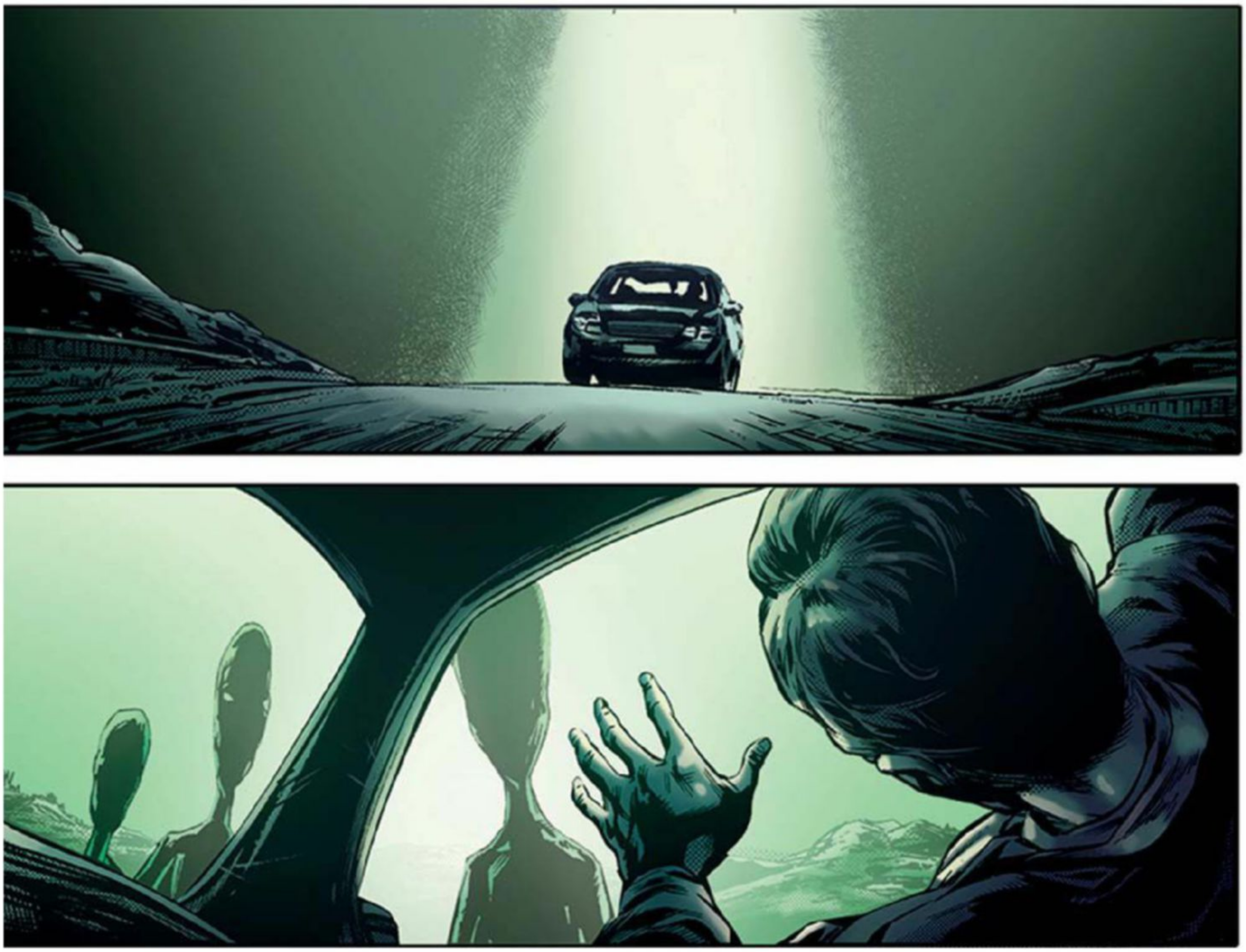
Arcadia tells her core team of advisors something they're appalled to hear on the verge of an election campaign: that she thinks she was abducted by aliens. "Only poor people get abducted by aliens!" yells strategist Chloe. Arcadia isn't sure, however, exactly what 'abducted by aliens' means. But in any case, she's not going to tell anyone. She's going to try to discover the truth, and is now even more motivated to become President.

With the help of her loyal campaign manager Harry, her fiercely sceptical (and Republican) advisor Chloe, and the 'UFO expert' they hire and get to sign the tightest of NDAs, Professor Joshua Kidd, Arcadia covertly ventures into the world of UFO mythology. The original run dealt with such subjects as the Men in Black as a USAF hazing tradition (an idea I first heard in a lecture by, I think, Jenny Randles at a *Fortean Times* UnConvention), the links between the ufology culture of talk radio and far right conspiracy theories, and the idea that 'screen memories' of, for instance, rabbits, can stand in for aliens. (There's a good reason why certain people in this comic refer to the process of becoming a believer as "going down the rabbit hole".) Along the way, Arcadia wins the Democratic nomination and defeats the incumbent to become President. But she starts to feel, worryingly, that unseen political forces have been on her side all along.

So we begin *Saucer State* with Arcadia in the White House, able to use the full powers of her office to ask whether or not the US Government really does know more about aliens than the American public. What does she find? Well, not much at all at first. But then something happens at the end of issue #1 that changes everything, and which gives Arcadia a new and dangerous ticking clock to race, one

FACING PAGE: Saucer State's main protagonist has to deal with the challenges of US presidential politics and the terrifying thought that she has been abducted by aliens.





ABOVE: Arcadia and Michael's interrupted journey, from the first issue of *Saucer Country*.

that's got nothing to do with the election cycle.

Of course, an awful lot has changed between 2013 and now. In US politics, Trumpism (if it can be credited with an 'ism') has taken the place of rationality, while in ufology, the Greys (though of course they still abduct people) have become over-used in fiction and sidelined by more modern monsters. The latter doesn't trouble me too much, because we've always dealt with the UFO myth as a changing landscape. The former is reflected in *Saucer State* in a new emphasis on 'post truth politics', as Arcadia's next likely challenger reveals himself in all his lying squalor. Also – and I'm proud to say we saw this coming and planted the seeds in the previous run – the Russians have a major part to play in the new series. Our story has become, as the blurb for *Saucer State* #1 has it, "a bulletin from the brightest timeline": from a point before last year when I was sure a woman could, and would, finally get to the White House. We're now a long way from the moment when, during her campaign, Hillary Clinton seemed to be considering whether or not UFO disclosure might help her cause.

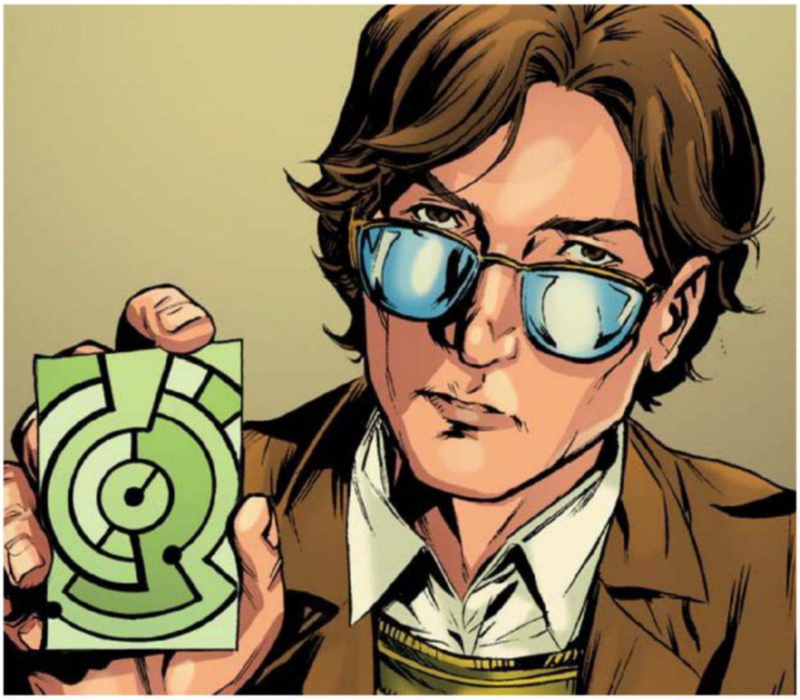
Arcadia now represents hope, and, in the face of terrible abuse (because, as a comic for adults, we can say out loud that the process of abduction is abuse) she remains professional, clever, and in charge of the situation – even when Chloe keeps throwing the word 'alien' at her in debate rehearsals. We'll be getting into what previous US Presidents seemed to know or wanted to find out about the UFO phenomenon, going to Hollywood parties of the 1970s with screenwriters who've started to wonder if their material is being used as mythology, seeing if, in the end, there is still truth to be found in the new world of the big lie.

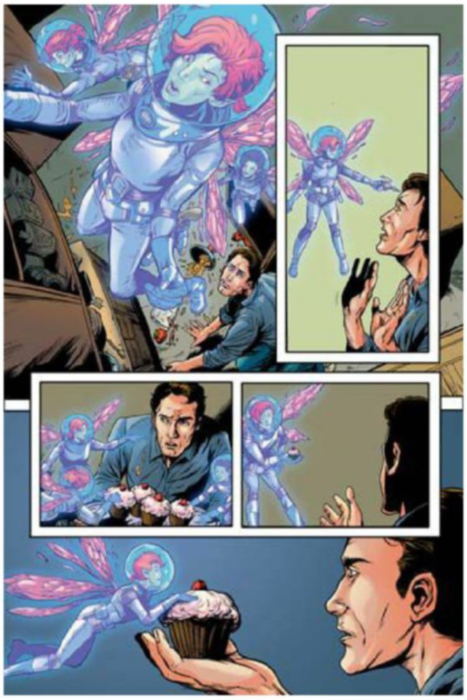
We'll be getting into what previous US Presidents knew about the UFO phenomenon

We've given ourselves the specific aim in *Saucer State* of answering every question that was raised by *Saucer Country*, tying up every dangling plot thread and delivering satisfaction out of mystery. (We are, perhaps, learning from certain other franchises that have dabbled in similar areas.)

REVELATORY JOURNEYS

So what will a fortean find in these pages? Well, they'll encounter a very familiar authorial viewpoint. I own every issue of *Fortean Times*. I've been immersed in this material since I was a child, when I'd scare myself reading secondhand UFO books, always worrying about what eye-witness drawing of something seemingly real and yet world-shaking I'd find when I turned the page. Unpicking a culturally determined narrative of 'alien abduction' from a wry, but caring, distance is something *FT* has prepared me for over the decades. The fortean point of view is represented most faithfully in the character of Joshua Kidd. He's been suspended from his position in academia for being too publicly interested in Fort's 'damned data' – he's a sort of John Mack figure, but one who believes in keeping a greater distance between himself and belief in any particular thesis than Mack did. It takes him a whole page to (not) answer the simple question, "Do you believe in UFOs?" Throughout most of *Saucer*





ABOVE LEFT: Professor Joshua Kidd offers a fortean perspective on strange phenomena and UFO lore in the series. **ABOVE LEFT:** Arcadia's husband Michael has encountered fairies since he was a child, and one encounter has definite echoes of the high strangeness events of the 'Mince Pie Martians' case.

Country, Kidd finds himself advised by two small hallucinatory figures, which look just like the human couple drawn on a plaque on the side of the Pioneer 10 space probe. He regards them as Jungian thought forms from his own unconscious. They see themselves as his 'magical helpers'. But they turn out to be something else entirely, something from the world of conspiracy theories concerning 'mind control'.

Kidd is a follower of the 'psychosocial hypothesis', finding it hard to believe that UFOs are spaceships piloted by aliens. That 'nuts-and-bolts' approach is represented in the comic by the Bluebirds, a secret group of aviation professionals who think aero-engineering is ahead of theoretical physics when it comes to airframes, and whose shady origins seem to stretch back to the Foo Fighters of World War II.

Issue #5 of the original run, 'A Field Guide to Flying Saucers' (drawn by guest artist Jimmy Broxton) is a lecture delivered by Kidd to the rest of the team, bringing them up to speed on the history of UFO mythology. I use it to draw a couple of my own conclusions, and to go down various byways, such as whether or not the flavourless and un-salted foodstuffs sometimes given to humans by aliens has any connection to the aversion to salt shown by supernatural creatures. It covers everything from Kenneth Arnold to the Shaver mystery, from classical and historic abduction narratives to Barney and Betty Hill and Serpo. This 'real' material from UFO lore is part of what the comic is about. *Saucer Country* actually began with a short strip in Vertigo's *Strange Adventures* anthology, which chronicled the career of alien contactee George Adamski and his meetings with the Venusian Orthon (it will also be reprinted in the IDW collection). All the names Kidd uses in his lecture are still, to me, signs full of wonder. I drove round New Mexico with my wife during the planning of *Saucer Country*. I wanted to visit all the places, from both spaceflight history and ufology, where the sky had touched the Earth. This mythology is *so* rich – as American as jazz, and exported just as widely. To declare any part of it 'true' and ignore the rest is an act of vandalism, but one that's continually committed.

Michael, Arcadia's ex-husband, goes on a revelatory journey through both comics, one that's a product of him encountering fairies as a child. He'd come to regard them as imaginary, but now they occupy a much more liminal place in his head. He's a kind of reluctant everyman figure, trying to be something as the world changes around him, but not quite sure what. His experiences with the fairies have resulted in some of my favourite comics pages, and a single issue of the original run that I think might be, all in all, my best piece of work.

While *The X-Files* took fortean material and cherry-picked it for the series's own backstory (so much so that in that show a "fortean event" has the very specific meaning of an anomalous fall of, say, fish, and nothing more), *Saucer State* treats the business of UFOs as a body of mythology that exists exactly as it does in the real world. Our heroes have to encounter it and decide for themselves what's real. One major source for my thinking has been Mark Pilkington's book (and film) *Mirage Men*, (see **FT317:38-40**) which is a truly sane piece of work concerning what are perhaps the only possible concrete roots of the UFO myth. In *Saucer State*, things aren't quite so simple. In issue #5 of the new run, Michael, under the influence of powerful horse tranquillisers, takes a tour of the fictional solar system with George Adamski's old friend Orthon. It's a sequence heavily influenced by Jeffrey Kripal's *Authors of the Impossible.* Kripal is a game-changer for me, a writer who's fully taken on Charles Fort's philosophy and run with it, creating a rational religious response to the numinous. *Saucer State* is powered by his work too.

Saucer State is *The West Wing* meets *The X-Files*, politics and the numinous, the art of the possible dealing with the impossible; but as I hope you've seen from the above, it's also a journey from fear to hope, from post-truth to truth again. We have an ending, and we're heading for it. And so is Arcadia.

Saucer State is the distillation of a life spent gazing in awe at the impossible, and immersing myself in every detail of fortean subjects. It's been an honour to talk about it in the pages of the magazine whence the first thought of it sprang.

Saucer State #1 is in comic shops, and available digitally on the ComiXology site, on Wednesday, 10 May. Paul Cornell will be signing copies that evening at London's Forbidden Planet.

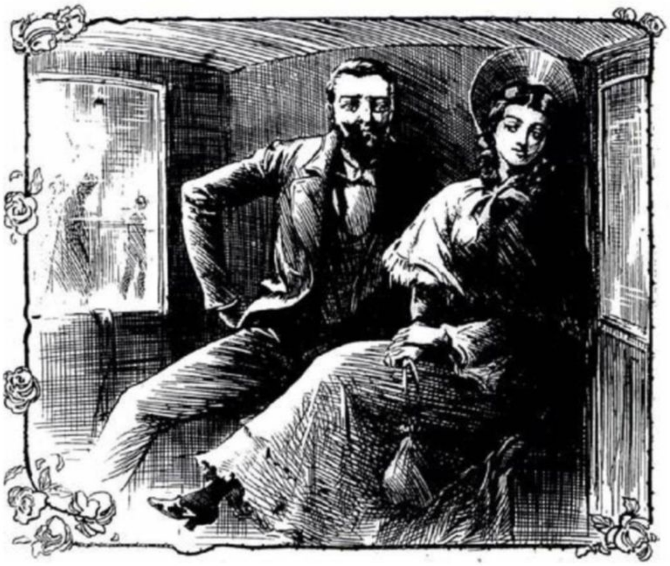
PAUL CORNELL is an award-winning writer of novels, including the **Shadow Police** *series, comics, short fiction and non-fiction, as well as a TV screenwriter for* **Doctor Who** *and many other series. You can find his website at www.paulcornell.com.*

The Ghost of Eliza Grimwood

JAN BONDESON turns detective in an attempt to close the files on one of the most notorious unsolved crimes of the Victorian era – a bloody 'ripping' that turned an address on London's South Bank into a haunted murder house.

When that intrepid ghost-hunter Mr Elliott O'Donnell was making some inquiries about London's haunted murder houses in the 1890s, he found an old street hawker named Jonathan who had been a boy at the time of one of London's most notorious unsolved murders: the brutal 'ripping' of prostitute Eliza Grimwood at 12 Wellington Terrace, Waterloo Road, back in 1838 when Queen Victoria was young. Jonathan's mother, who had known both Eliza and her boyfriend William Hubbard, used to say that the former was "as tidy a looking girl as was to be found in the 'ole neighbourhood." A Mrs Glover, who used to visit somebody lodging in Hubbard's house, had twice seen Eliza Grimwood's ghost, dressed just as she had been in her lifetime, making the bed in the murder room. People in Wellington Terrace saw the ghost looking out through the ground floor window so often that they got used to it, and were not alarmed by its presence, or so at least O'Donnell assures us.

In contemporary articles on 'Murder Houses', the sinister dwelling in what had used to be Wellington Terrace was compared with the 'Curse' on Mitre Square, site of one of the 'Ripper' crimes, and with 22 Wyndham Road, Camberwell, where an entire family had been exterminated. Similar in notoriety was the strange Bloomsbury 'Murder Neighbourhood' that had been the site of the unsolved Euston Square, Burton Crescent and Great Coram Street mysteries. In the early 1900s, the Wellington Terrace murder house was still standing. The area remained a seedy and rundown part of London, although traffic across Waterloo Bridge gathered apace. In 1905, the journalist Guy Logan wrote in the 'murder houses' column of the old magazine *Famous Crimes Past & Present*, that: "No 12, Wellington Terrace, is daily passed by thousands who have no idea that it was once the scene of a most mysterious murder. There Eliza Grimwood, fair and frail, was cruelly done to death by a male 'fiend' whom she had permitted to accompany her home from the Strand Theatre ..."

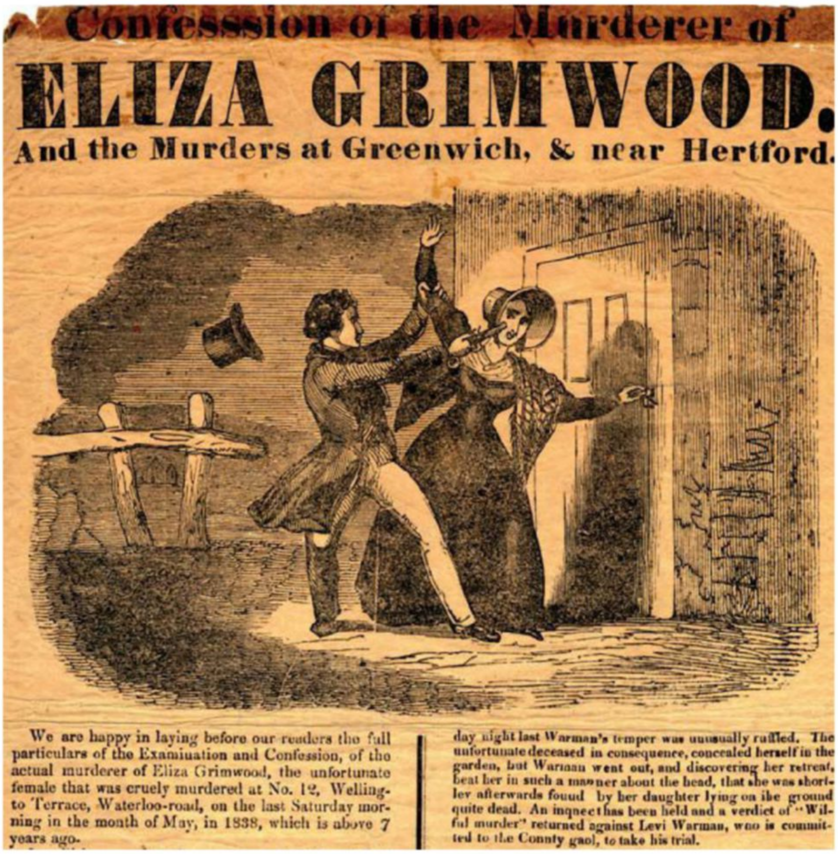


ABOVE: Eliza Grimwood entering the cab with 'the Foreigner', a fanciful drawing from *Famous Crimes Past and Present*.

THE MURDER

On 26 May 1838, the young prostitute Eliza Grimwood went to the Strand Theatre, a well-known place of assignation among the better class of London harlots. She was met there by a young, well-dressed foreigner, who spoke excellent English although with a French accent still apparent. He looked like a respectable gentleman's servant. Eliza and the Foreigner may well have been previously acquainted; at any rate, they seemed to be the very best of friends as they travelled across Waterloo Bridge in a cab, laughing and joking together. A witness saw them arrive at 12 Wellington Terrace just after midnight, still in a jolly and exhilarated mood. When Eliza's servant Mary Fisher let them into the house, the Foreigner hid his face from her, and hastily walked into the parlour. The other four people in the house – Eliza's boyfriend William Hubbard, the commercial traveller William Best, the prostitute Mary Glover and the servant Mary Fisher – all spent a comfortable night, although Eliza's little spaniel dog was heard to bark once or twice.

The following morning, William Hubbard



Confesssion of the Murderer of

ELIZA GRIMWOOD.

And the Murders at Greenwich, & near Hertford.

We are happy in laying before our readers the full particulars of the Examiuation and Confession, of the actual murderer of Eliza Grimwood, the unfortunate female that was cruely murdered at No. 12, Wellingto Terrace, Waterloo-road, on the last Saturday morning in the month of May, in 1838, which is above 7 years ago.

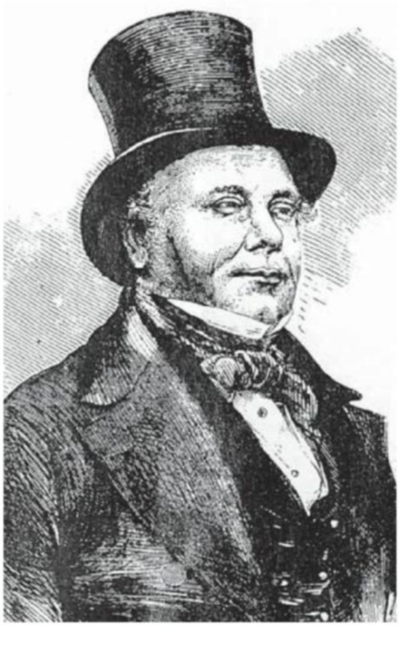
day night last Warman's temper was unusually ruffled. The unfortunate deceased in consequence, concealed herself in the garden, but Warman went out, and discovering her retreat, beat her in such a manner about the head, that she was shortley afterwards fouud by her daughter lying on the ground quite dead. An inqnect has been held and a verdict of "Wilful murder" returned against Levi Warman, who is committed to the Conuty gaol, to take his trial.

was going to work as a bricklayer when he found Eliza murdered in her bedroom, with her throat dreadfully cut and her abdomen violently 'ripped'. There was uproar in London, and the newspapers were full of the 'Waterloo Road Horror'. The officer in charge of the murder investigation was Inspector Charles Frederick Field, an experienced policeman with a distinguished record. In the five years Inspector Field had served in the Lambeth area, he had made the acquaintance of many of its inhabitants. He had of course known Eliza Grimwood, who had commonly been called the Countess because of her handsome appearance, elegant clothes and proud carriage. As he later told his friend Charles Dickens: "When I saw the poor Countess (I had known her well enough to speak to), lying dead with her throat cut, on the floor of her bedroom, a variety of reflections calculated to make a man rather low in his spirits, came into my head."

Inspector Field saw two possibilities: either 'the Foreigner' had murdered Eliza, seemingly just for the fun of it, or Hubbard was the guilty man. A purse full of gold guineas had been stolen from the murder room, but Eliza's valuable jewellery had been left behind in her cabinet. Eight florins, apparently the wages of sin she had been given by her visitor, had also been left. The Foreigner had been seen by several witnesses at the Strand Theatre, and Inspector Field managed to track down the cab man who had driven him and Eliza to Wellington Terrace.

Hubbard was a rough character who was partially supported by Eliza's not inconsiderable earnings. He resented Eliza's regular customers, many of whom were respectable gentlemen, particularly a certain William Osborne, a Birmingham sword-cutler who was going to take her to the Epsom races. But there was no blood on Hubbard's clothes, except what had splashed onto his trousers in his mad dash to get out of the murder room, nor was there any trace of the murder weapon. All Hubbard's shirts were identified, and they were all free from blood. And could Hubbard, who was clearly a creature of modest intellect and dissipated habits, really have committed the murder without alerting any other person in the house, or leaving any worthwhile clue?

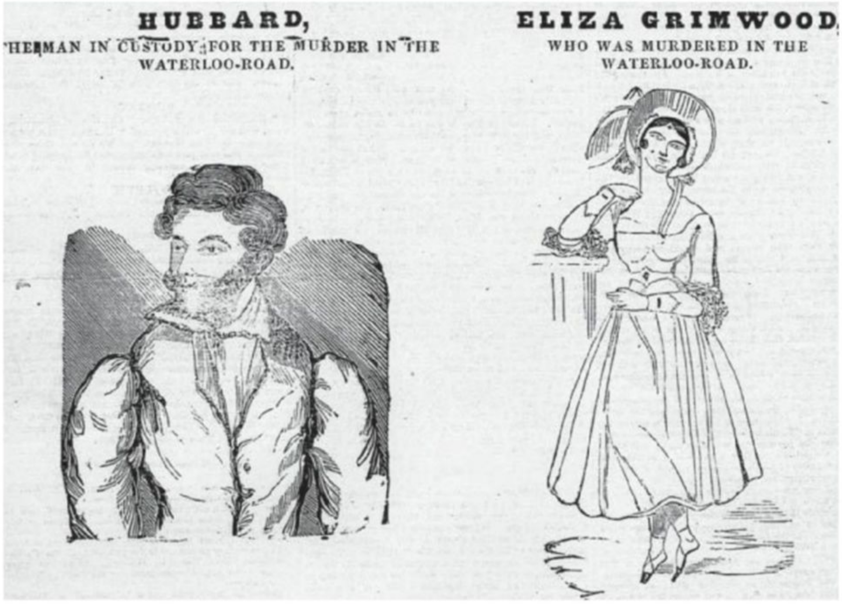
Many people halted to admire the bloodstained floorboards in the murder room



LEFT: A handbill announcing Private Hill's confession. The main image, wrongly showing Hill shooting Eliza Grimwood, had probably been 'lifted' from some other broadsheet. **BELOW:** Inspector Charles Frederick Field, from the *Illustrated London News* of 1855.

THE AUCTION

Inspector Field hoped that the Foreigner would make himself known to the police to clear his name, so that Hubbard could be put under pressure, but this never happened. A man named John Owen claimed to have seen the murderer standing outside 12 Wellington Terrace, but at the coroner's inquest, he proved to be a liar and time-waster. After an anonymous letter had been received from a 'John Walter Cavendish' claiming to be Eliza's client for the night of the murder, and saying that Hubbard had 'bullied' him and thrown him out of the house, the bricklayer was arrested. While Hubbard was in police custody, Eliza's three brothers had posters pasted up all over London saying that the murdered Eliza Grimwood's belongings would be sold by auction. An auction catalogue headed 'By the Administrators of the late Eliza Grimwood' was printed and sold for three pence; no person would be admitted to the murder house unless they could produce one of these vouchers. When the doors were opened, there was a tremendous rush for admission, including a number of well-dressed gentlemen and ladies. Although the sale was held in one of the first floor rooms, many people halted to admire the bloodstained floorboards in the murder room. The bidding was brisk for Eliza's chairs and sofa, and particularly for her fine mahogany chest of drawers. The deceased's bed attracted even fiercer bidding, since it was liberally marked with spattered blood. In total, the furniture sold for £64, a little more than the valuation, Eliza's watch and jewellery having already been sold for above £80. After the auction, it was impossible for the buyers to leave the house by way of Wellington Terrace, due to the dense crowd outside. At the advice of the auctioneer, they had to be let out through the back, before the angry mob outside, waving their auction catalogues and demanding entry, could be let in to see the murder room. Disappointed that no mementoes of the murdered woman


HUBBARD,
THE MAN IN CUSTODY FOR THE MURDER IN THE WATERLOO-ROAD.
ELIZA GRIMWOOD
WHO WAS MURDERED IN THE WATERLOO-ROAD.

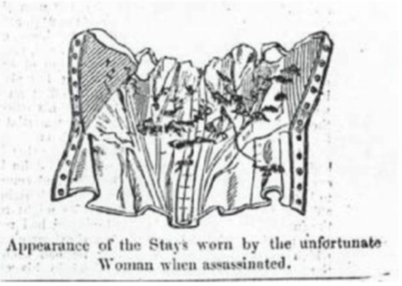
ABOVE: Celebrities of the day: Hubbard and Eliza from the *Penny Satirist* of 10 June 1838. It may be questioned whether these are real portrait drawings, however. 'Eliza' looks rather like a stock image of a ballet dancer, complete with the dancing shoes

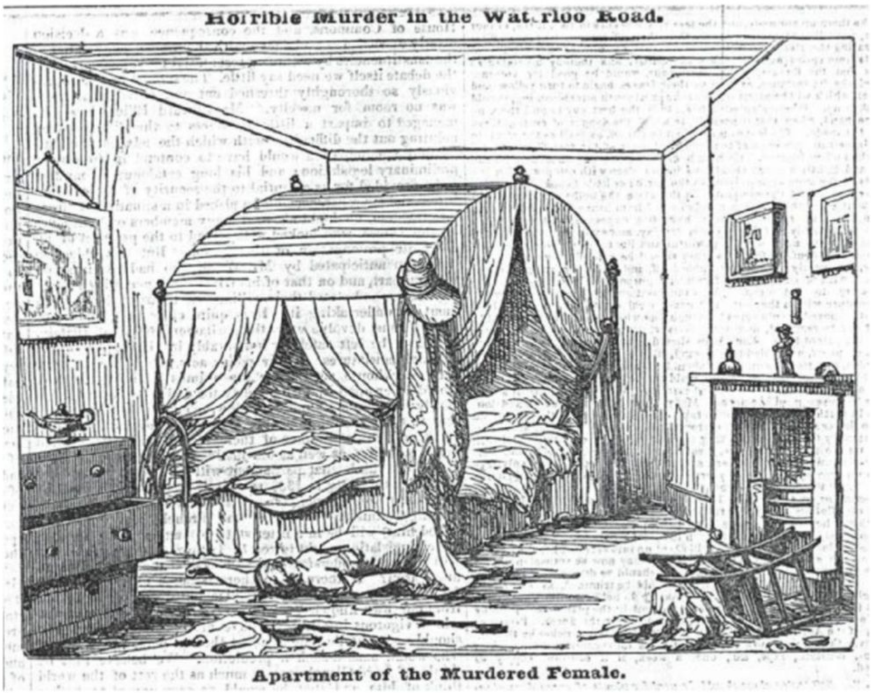
remained, one of these rowdy fellows made a bid for the bloodstained carpet, which he swiftly rolled up and took outside, proposing to cut it up into smaller fragments to sell to the mob outside. The greedy Grimwood brothers must have been grinding their teeth that they had not thought of this stratagem themselves.

The murder of Eliza Grimwood was never solved, in spite of some late drama in 1845 when a private soldier named George Hill confessed to the murder to get out of the military. My conclusion would be the same as that of Inspector Field: namely that the Foreigner did it. There is strong technical evidence in favour of Hubbard's innocence, and his conduct after the murder was hardly that of a guilty man. The real killer was clearly a very cool customer, and Inspector Field marvelled at his ability to avoid detection. It was almost as if he had committed murder before. Can anything be concluded regarding the identity of this elusive Foreigner? It turns out that while the Swiss valet François Benjamin Courvoisier was awaiting execution in Newgate for the murder of his master, Lord William Russell, in 1840, he wanted to confess to the murder of Eliza Grimwood, although his uncle persuaded him to keep quiet. According to a note from the crime historian Guy Logan, the author and amateur criminologist George R Sims had heard that while in his Newgate death cell, Courvoisier had wished to confess to two recent unsolved murders of young London 'unfortunates', most likely those of Eliza Grimwood in 1838 and the barmaid Eliza Davies in 1837. There are also some circumstances linking Courvoisier to the unsolved murder of the clockmaker Robert Westwood in 1839, and his former employer testified that one evening, the Swiss valet had arrived home very late, panting and bedraggled, and there had been speculation that he had committed a murder. Courvoisier perfectly fits the description of the Foreigner, with regard to height, build, features and clothing, and he also fits the description of the young French 'boyfriend' of Eliza Davies. He would not be the only example of an opportunistic serial killer, who murdered men for the sake of profit and women for motives of sexual sadism.

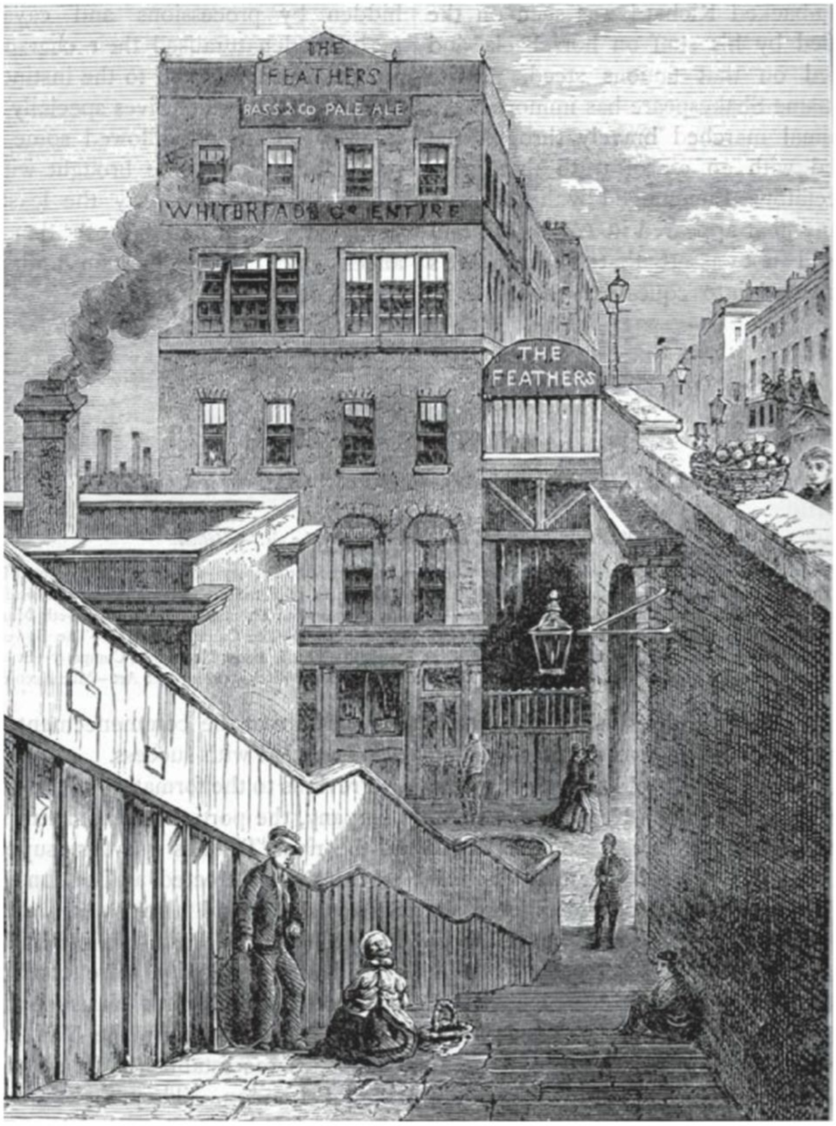
THE HOUSE

After Eliza Grimwood's effects had been sold at auction, it must have been very difficult for Hubbard to find a tenant for the house in Wellington Terrace, since every Londoner knew that a particularly gruesome murder had been committed there. Rumours soon spread that the empty house was haunted by Eliza's restless spirit. Hubbard stayed at his mother's house, and did not dare to move back to Wellington Terrace, although he still had the let of the house. In September 1838, a newspaper wrote that: "Notwithstanding the length of time which has elapsed since the murder of Eliza Grimwood, the house which she occupied in the Waterloo-road has remained untenanted ever since Hubbard quitted it. In order to facilitate the letting of it, the landlord has reduced the rent considerably, but all to no purpose. Numerous have been the applications from individuals of both sexes to look over the house, upon the pretence of taking it, should it suit their convenience, but it has afterwards been apparent, with no other object than that of gratifying an idle curiosity. From present appearances no one is likely very soon to become the inmate


Appearance of the Stays worn by the unfortunate Woman when assassinated.


Horrible Murder in the Waterloo Road.
Apartment of the Murdered Female.

ABOVE: Eliza Grimwood's bedroom with the body; from the *Weekly Chronicle* of 3 June 1838, and a drawning of her stays from the same publication a week later.



LEFT: The Feathers public house and Wellington Terrace, from Volume 6 of Walter Thornbury and Edward Walford's *Old and New London*.

of this dwelling, so notorious is it in the annals of crime, while the landlord has the mortification of knowing that he is not only pestered by inquisitive observers, but is sure to be a very great pecuniary sufferer by its inoccupancy.”

Rumours soon spread that the empty house was haunted by Eliza's restless spirit

And the gloomy prediction of this journalist would prove to be true. The haunted murder house at 12 Wellington Terrace stood empty throughout 1839, 1840, 1841 and 1842, although the Post Office directory for 1843 shows that it had finally got a tenant, the German wine merchant Adolphus Feistel, who may well have been an immigrant who could not understand what all the fuss was about. In 1844, the various ‘Terraces’ in Waterloo Road were incorporated in the main road, and the houses renumbered: the murder house at No 12 became 192 Waterloo Road. The old numbering also remained, however, and the phrase ‘Wellington Terrace, Waterloo Road’ was in use well into the 1860s. Adolphus Feistel lived on in the murder house until 1851, along with his wife who was a foreign toy dealer; the next tenant was the violin maker William Ebsworth Hill, who would remain in the house until 1868. In 1864, a journalist wrote, in an article on cheap dinners and where to find them: “If the gastronomic student will cross Waterloo-bridge, will walk down that combination of dubious tenancy and faded respectability known as the Waterloo-road, will pass the half-forgotten site of Eliza Grimwood's murder, will proceed under the railway bridge, and continue his pilgrimage almost due south…” In 1865, the houses in Waterloo Road were again renumbered, from the centre of London towards the periphery, those on the eastern side of the road receiving uneven numbers: the Feathers tavern close to Waterloo Bridge on the Surrey side of the river became 1 Waterloo Road, and the murder house 27 Waterloo Road.

In the years to come, a number of respectable tradesmen would live in the rehabilitated murder house: the portmanteau maker Wollrath Zwanziger, the cork manufacturer Henry Clemence, and the watchmaker Abraham Kaufmann. Old Waterloo Bridge was closed to traffic in 1924 after becoming increasingly unstable. After a heated debate as to whether it should be repaired or destroyed, it was demolished in 1936, and a new bridge constructed next to it. The murder house at what was now 27 Waterloo Road still stood in 1937, but its days were numbered: in 1938, it is recorded to have been empty, and in 1939, it is no longer listed in the Post Office directory. In 1940, only the Feathers tavern at 1 Waterloo Road and a shortened terrace consisting of the remaining Wellington Terrace houses at 3-11 Waterloo Road were still standing. The Cornwall House Annexe of the HM Customs and Excise had been constructed where the remainder of the terrace once stood, with the Royal Waterloo Hospital for Women and Children occupying the corner with Stamford Street. In 1951, only 11 Waterloo Road remained, but this *ultimus* of old Wellington Terrace was pulled down the following year. Although some older houses in Waterloo Road remain at the corner with Exton Street, nothing whatsoever remains of Wellington Terrace; the Cornwall House Annexe is today the Waterloo Campus of Kings College London, and the Royal Waterloo Hospital has become the Conway Hall of the University of Notre Dame. If the ghost of Eliza Grimwood has not been exorcised by constant noise from the motor vehicles in busy Waterloo Road, the clatter from the trains on their way to Waterloo Station, and the revel of the jolly young students, then it would gaze in horror at the Southbank Centre and the National Film Theatre, and that curious contraption, the London Eye.

THE RIPPER OF WATERLOO ROAD

This is an edited extract from Jan Bondeson's latest book, *The Ripper of Waterloo Road* (History Press, 2017). For more on the subject, see the author's two-part feature “London's Haunted Murder Houses” in **FT318:40-46**, **319:30-38**.

*◆ **JAN BONDESON** is a senior lecturer at Cardiff University, a regular contributor to FT and the author of numerous books, including* **Queen Victoria's Stalker** *(2010), and* **Murder Houses of London** *(2014).*

STRANGE STATESMEN #19

JAMMEH THE NUT

With former Gambian President Yahya Jammeh unceremoniously ejected from the tiny West African country's premises by a one-time Argos security-guard, **SD TUCKER** looks back upon a 22-year-long reign of malevolent magical misrule.

In January 2017, a divided nation whose frustrated electorate were crying out for change finally got a longed-for new leader, one who threatened to shake things up amongst the tired old political elite and bring about a whole new way of governing. That nation was the former British colony of Gambia, and its shiny new leader was Adama Barrow, a property-developer and coalition-leader who had once worked as a security-guard at the Holloway Road branch of Argos in London during the early 2000s. The incumbent President, Yahya Jammeh, initially seemed to accept this surprise result, but later changed his mind, when it was suggested he might face prosecution for certain crimes committed under his rule. But what, precisely, were these crimes? As befits someone who was deposed by a man from Argos, there was a whole catalogue of them…

LEFT: President Jammeh in 2011, sceptre in hand and filling most of what looks to be a comfy two-seater sofa.

SEYLLOU / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

LITTLE BIG MAN

Jammeh's story began in 1994 when the military instituted a coup against Gambia's then-President, Sir Dawda Jawara. A race started among ambitious young officers to see who could get to Jawara's Presidential Palace and declare himself President first. Jammeh, then a 29-year-old Lieutenant, was quickest off the mark. At first, his attempts at playing the traditional African despot's 'Big Man' role were unimpressive. He ordered the construction of a large commemorative structure named 'Arch 22' in the capital, Banjul, then decreed that only he was allowed to drive his car through it. He claimed to be an Admiral in the Nebraskan Navy, an office which does not exist. He banned green cars. He gave himself all kinds of laughable honorifics, with his official title, at its longest, becoming 'His Excellency, Sheikh Professor Alhaji Dr Yahya Abdul-Aziz Awal Jemus Junkung Jammeh Naasiru Deen, Defender of the Faith, Babili Mansa, Chief Bridge-Builder and Conqueror of Rivers, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and Chief Custodian of the Sacred Constitution of the Gambia' – a tight fit on most application-forms. His subjects, well aware of his darkening character, preferred to call him simply 'Papa Don't Take No Mess'. To outsiders, however, largely unaware of the politically motivated arrests and other abuses which were quietly building up in the background as his rule progressed, President Jammeh seemed like a fairly harmless and comic figure, whose rule at least brought stability to his country, which was more than could be said for some of his peers. [1]

Eventually, 'Diddy Amin' began to flex his muscles more openly. Jammeh had always dressed flamboyantly, in flowing white African robes and cap, but alongside these, he now carried a Koran, prayer-beads and traditional wooden healer's staff around with him everywhere he went. Maybe he was trying to look devout, in line with the fact that 90 per cent of his countrymen followed Islam. Or was he getting back in touch with his ancient African heritage? Certainly, during his second decade in power, Jammeh became more stridently nationalistic and anti-Western in tone. In 2013, he withdrew Gambia from the Commonwealth, calling it a "neo-colonial" institution, deeming incessant Western preaching about "democracy, human-rights and good governance" to be simply a white man's "religion". Jammeh said he was answerable only to Allah, not to man-made organisations like the International Criminal Court, from which he also split, boasting he had been given a mandate to rule for "one billion years" by God, and anyone who objected could "go to Hell". Jammeh's only responsibility as a ruler from now on was, he said, "to do what I am doing and for people to talk about it". In 2014, claiming Britain had only colonised Gambia because the country "had a lot of elephants", he proclaimed that English should no longer be the official national language. Jammeh had a real dislike of Britain, claiming it had deliberately covered up Gambia's (imaginary) central role in the aviation industry. All opposition parties, he said, were really funded by London, so he banned megaphones to prevent them getting their message across. Declaring Gambia an Islamic Republic, he surprisingly reversed the Muslim tradition of showing clemency at the end of Ramadan, and ordered prisoners be shot – before then cancelling this command… in an act of clemency. [2] Had the pressures of office made Jammeh go bananas?

THE DRUGS DON'T WORK

In 2007, Jammeh held a press conference, announcing the surprising news that he had managed to cure AIDS. He had done this, he said, by mashing up some herbs and smearing the resultant green gunk all over patients' semi-naked bodies, whilst praying to Allah. If AIDS patients then drank a yellow herbal potion and ate two bananas, they could be cured in as little as three days. If you wanted him to cure *you* of AIDS too, Jammeh said you should come to his State House on Thursdays, and he would give you a quick once-over; if you had asthma, meanwhile, the President's healing hands were available to you every Friday or Saturday. Everyone was welcome, just so long as they were willing to admit they had AIDS in public – otherwise the cure wouldn't work. Only 10 AIDS patients at a time were allowed in to see him at first, in a nation where it was estimated 20,000 suffered from the malady, but asthma patients could be cured *en masse*, 100 at a time. It was uncertain what the ingredients of Yahya's marvellous medicine were, other than "naturally available forest products such as fruits, leaves, branches and roots of trees", but he had been told the secret formulæ in a dream one night by his ancestors. Ever since seizing power, he had secretly been treating the poor, and selling his potions unadvertised at a local police-station, but recently Allah had given him permission to tell the world about his powers, and to export large quantities of his asthma tonic to the Taiwanese government, but no other; accordingly, the Taiwanese ambassador was invited to this press conference, and no doubt left totally bemused.

"I am not a witch-doctor," Jammeh explained, "and in fact you cannot have a witch-doctor. You are either a witch or a doctor." Foreign experts disagreed that Jammeh was a doctor, leading him to condemn them for engaging in a Western-led conspiracy to deny his powers in order to enrich multinational drug-companies. As proof of his magic, Jammeh put his patients' medical records online, together with nonsensical declarations that they now had "zero virus-load". Furthermore, every year on the anniversary of his first AIDS cure, Jammeh held a public celebration at which it was announced that another disease had been conquered by "His Excellency's gifted extensive knowledge from the Supreme God in the field of herbs". The list included high blood pressure, strokes, paralysis, toothache, ulcers, "all types of stomach problems", arthritis, diabetes, sickle-cell anæmia, ebola, TB, skin cancer and various other "complicated diseases". In his 2017 anniversary celebration, Jammeh was due to announce he had cured all other varieties of cancer too, though this wonder will now never take place. He could also cure impotence, "but due to the nature of this ailment, it [alone] is always treated in private." He even discovered how to cure infertility by casting out evil spirits and "dark forces" from barren women: 1,972 "healthy bouncing babies" have been born thanks to Jammeh's womb-exorcisms, many of which were then named after him or prominent members of his family by way of maternal gratitude. Seeing such "scary/supernatural occurrences" performed live on TV, "a large majority of Gambians" touchingly pleaded with their leader to cease, lest the demons "take their revenge on him or his future generations", but he refused to listen. Instead, Jammeh funded and built a hospital, the Kanilai Alternative Clinic, where seriously ill people could come and be fed bananas and unknown yellow liquids by a team of doctors led by the Gambian Health Minister, Dr Tamsir Mbowe, who had been specially trained in "injecting lasting happiness into the minds of the depressed and sick".[3]

IT WAS UNCERTAIN WHAT THE INGREDIENTS OF THE MARVELLOUS MEDICINE WERE

LEFT: Performers at one of Jammeh's presidential campaign rallies demonstrate the magical powers of a 'spiritual water' that makes them immune to sharp blades. Don't try this at home.

MARCO LONGARI / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

At his annual celebrations, whilst crowds held up crude banners hailing him as 'THE MEDICAL MYTH BURSTER', Jammeh would look out across the gathering and bemoan the fact many of those he had cured had not bothered to turn up to thank and praise him that day (possibly because they were dead). To boost attendance, in 2016 Jammeh rebranded the event as National Traditional Medicine Day, and devised a natty slogan – "Going Back to the Roots for a Long and Healthier Life".

His use of the word 'roots' here was significant, as Jammeh was obsessed with the fact that the hit 1977 TV mini-series *Roots* told the fictionalised story of a real-life slave from Gambia named Kunta Kinte. In 2011, he rechristened a Gambian island containing an old British slave-fort 'Kunta Kinteh Island' in his hero's memory, and in 1996 set up a biennial tourist-event known as The International Roots Festival, which encouraged black people from all across the world to come and "return to their roots" in the land from which their ancestors had once been stolen. Here, visitors could take part in traditional tribal initiation ceremonies presided over by Jammeh himself and visit Kunta Kinte's ancestral village whilst being lectured about white countries' "highly organised conspiracy to keep Africa economically dependent" on them.[4] This was why Jammeh said foreigners criticised his AIDS cure – because they were "startled that an African man, from a rich African heritage, solved what the so-called 'superior' whites have always deemed unsolvable". Jammeh's AIDS patients had to stop taking their Western-made anti-retroviral drugs and put their faith instead purely in him, who "symbolises everything that is resistance" to Western ways. According to Jammeh, "our grandparents were healthier when there were no hospitals", and their medical needs were treated only by the occasional passing vet. Apparently, "when the colonists came they wanted to take everything [medical] we had before and sell their [inferior] medicines to us" instead for profit, leading whites to slander traditional healers as 'witch-doctors'. Africans lived longer when they ate the herbs and roots prescribed by their village healers of old, Jammeh explained, advising his fellow blacks to "go back to our roots" in both senses of the word.[5]

IKIWANER / CREATIVE CIOMMONS

ABOVE: James Island, in the Gambia River, was rechristened Kunta Kinteh Island, testimony to President Jammeh's abiding love of the 1977 television series *Roots*.

THE INSANE ROOT THAT TAKES THE REASON PRISONER

In 2009, however, Jammeh proved that medicine based upon roots can sometimes be a bad thing – especially when you are forced to swallow some as part of a witch-hunt. The first thing the inhabitants of Gambia's countryside knew about the unexpected Presidential pogrom came when their dirt-poor rural villages were invaded by strange groups of men dressed in either red or green. Those coloured red, whose garb was festooned with mirrors, animal-horns and sea-shells, were witch-doctors or *marabouts*, sent to hunt out the evil loose in the country, whilst their gun-toting green companions were the much-feared 'Green Boys', Jammeh's most hard-line paramilitary supporters, who sometimes paint their faces green to match their clothing in honour of the official colour of their hero's Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC) party. The problem was that President Jammeh's aunt had suddenly fallen ill and died, something her superstitious nephew blamed upon witchcraft. Between January and March, the Green Boys and *marabouts* went from village to village, rounding up the elderly and bussing them away to strange locations before forcing them to drink and bathe in some mysterious liquid, an "evil-smelling concoction" resembling dirty water filled with herbs and roots. The potion produced unpleasant symptoms in most who drank it, ranging from unconsciousness to paralysis, whilst others went temporarily insane and tried climbing walls. Many vomited, wet themselves or suffered diarrhœa. At least six persons, from a total of around 1,000 suspected witches, died, and many survivors suffered from long-lasting after-effects such as stomach-cramps, headaches, kidney-problems and facial spasms. Meanwhile, the *marabouts* demanded younger villagers sacrifice red animals in graveyards to rid the land of black magic.

Allegedly, the magic-potion was simply a liquid version of the toxic native plant *kubee jaroo*, which causes hallucinations when ingested. Jammeh himself had reputedly ordered that each person's reaction to being force-fed this drink be video-taped, in the hope that the nature of the hallucinations the victim then described or acted out would give him or her away as the murderer of his aunt, or as another dissident of some kind. Policemen, politicians, civil-servants, military officers – and, for some strange reason, butchers – were also kidnapped, stripped naked and made to drink the stuff, whilst Green Boys sat around monitoring their babbling responses for signs of diabolic disloyalty. The subsequent testimony of one detained 'wizard' makes for particularly ironic reading. "We were captured," he said, "and treated just like how Kunta Kinte was forced into slavery." [6] Between 2015 and 2016, meanwhile, Jammeh was at it again. In one speech, he accused residents of the Foni area in western Gambia of "eating up their brightest sons through witchcraft", and when a soldier loyal to Jammeh fell ill in the region and was admitted to hospital, the dictator once more spied sorcery afoot when doctors admitted they had no idea what ailed the patient. Again, the *marabouts* and Green Boys were sent out into the countryside, rounding up villagers and taking them away to be tortured with hallucinogens.[7]

MARCO LONGARI / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Jammeh on walkabout in 2016, with the 'Green Boys', his paramilitary guards, bringing up the rear.

A TASTE OF HIS OWN MEDICINE

The fateful election year of 2016 saw many weird rumours being spread about Jammeh by opposition newspapers and websites; the Gambian equivalent, perhaps, of 'fake news'. Jammeh had supposedly ritually sacrificed 66 camels in some dark ceremony, it was said – but why? Word on the street was that Jammeh's *marabouts* had foreseen his days as President were numbered. The only way to prevent his fall, the wizards said, was for Jammeh to move on from camels and to sacrifice 70 innocent children to his secret collection of sinister idols, which desired fresh human blood. The catch was that 10 of the 70 children had to come from each of Gambia's seven main regions, and that their murder must go unnoticed and not provoke any mass uproar. Jammeh's reputed solution was to begin staging fatal road-accidents, then spiriting away the corpses of the child-victims to feed to his idols. Gambia's Fatu Radio Network ran an interview with someone claiming to be one of Jammeh's *marabouts*, confirming that this was all true, heightening the panic. Anti-Jammeh media began carrying supposed eyewitness accounts of helpless infants being kidnapped by heartless Green Boys, and encouraging voters to form vigilante groups for protection, before kicking Jammeh out at the polls. Reports emerged of a military vehicle from Jammeh's personal motorcade crashing into a schoolbus, leaving dozens of students/unwitting blood-donors

LEFT: Ex-President Jammeh waves to a crowd of supporters before leaving Gambia on 21 January 2017.

ANDREW RENNEISEN / GETTY IMAGES

critically injured, with the whole event purportedly then covered up. On social media, horror stories about vanishing kids trended like wildfire, as did dubious 'Missing Person' profiles of supposed abductees, complete with photos and contact details for their families. The hysteria became so serious that parents in the city of Brikama refused *en masse* to send pupils to school on 6 November, fearing Jammeh might abduct or run them over in his car. Police responded by denying there were any missing children, calling the rumours "false and baseless". By becoming the subject of such absurd magical accusations, the President was getting back exactly what he had meted out to others. [8]

A desperate Jammeh was then alleged to have tried lacing the nation's water supply with love-potion. According to the opposition *Freedom* newspaper, Jammeh had paid a *Grand Marabout* millions to help place "evil spiritual water" infected with hypnotic *ju-ju* inside wells and pumping-stations across the country. Thus, whenever innocent Gambians showered, had a drink or prepared their food, they were made to "love and embrace dictator Jammeh" against their will. Opposition supporters, the paper said, should "refuse to accept [bottled] water from strangers" as such people were Jammeh's spies. [9] This was evidently faulty *ju-ju*, however, as when December's poll came around, Jammeh lost. Given his numerous appalling acts, you might have thought that he would by now be sitting in a dank cell somewhere, awaiting trial. To avoid any bloodshed, though, other African leaders offered him a plum deal if he agreed to step down and fly off to live quietly in Equatorial Guinea rather than putting up a fight. Seeing that General Ousman Badije, Gambia's Chief of Defence Staff, said his troops would welcome any invading soldiers "with flowers and make them a cup of tea", Jammeh had little choice but to agree. His capital surrounded, he bade farewell to Gambia on 21 January 2017, with his successor President Barrow promising he would not be prosecuted for the misdeeds of his rule, this being considered a price worth paying for peace. That same day, a joint statement from the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union and UN generously also guaranteed that, in exile, the former strongman would be allowed to keep his assets and live free of fear of any inhumane "harassment or witch-hunting" from the authorities. [10] Perish the thought!

NOTES

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yahya_Jammeh; http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-24383225; http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/21/world/africa/21gambia.html; http://www.freedomnewspaper.com/gambia-dictator-jammeh-bans-green-cars-in-the-gambia-thousands-of-private-green-cars-grounded/; An 'Admiral of the Great Navy of Nebraska' is a kind of joke award, which gives the bearer control over "all officers, seamen, tadpoles and goldfish" in the landlocked State's fictional Navy. Nebraska's Governor had inadvertently handed one out to Jammeh and the dictator took it seriously, being proudly photographed holding a Certificate of Office. See www.omaha.com/news/nebraska/from-the-archives-state-unwittingly-bestows-nebraska-navy-honor-on/article_e3360e08-de95-11e6-9e70-7fa78648cd7a.html; According to Wikipedia, the real reason you can't drive beneath the poorly-constructed Arch-22 is actually because it might fall over…

2 www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16148458; www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/gambia/10353582/Gambia-to-leave-the-Commonwealth-after-president-accuses-West-of-lecturing-him-on-human-rights.html; www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/gambia/10686147/Gambia-president-rejects-English-language.html; https://sites.google.com/site/observerarchive/british-govt-is-supporting-opposition-parties—july-28-2010;

3 Compiled from too many sources to list here; most are accessible through part of Jammeh's Govt website; go to http://qanet.gm/statehouse/patp.htm and click through the numerous links for all this info.

4 www.rootsgambia.gm/about-root.php; http://www.rootsgambia.gm/programme.php; http://qanet.gm/statehouse/hivbreakthrough-anniversary_17-01-08.htm; http://qanet.gm/statehouse/patp.htm; Jammeh being anti-Western and anti-British, he has naturally found medical allies in the shape of a group of homeopaths from Islington; see www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africandindianocean/gambia/11472815/The-Gambian-despot-who-cured-HIV-AIDS-and-his-British-homoeopath-allies.html

5 http://qanet.gm/statehouse/Breakthrough-9th-anniversary-1yr-natl-trad-med-day_17012014.htm; http://qanet.gm/statehouse/Breakthrough-seventh-anniversary-countdown_16012014.htm;

6 **FT250:16**; www.nytimes.com/2009/05/21/world/africa/21gambia.html; www.kaironews.com/jammehs-fatal-witchcraft-cleansing/; www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-11200546

7 http://freedomnewspaper.com/gambia-breaking-news-gambia-arrests-suspected-witches-and-wizards/; www.freedomnewspaper.com/gambia-door-door-witch-hunting-residents-foni-kamfenda/; www.kaironews.com/foni-residents-flee-jammehs-witchcraft-terror/

8 www.kaironews.com/jammeh-set-for-mass-human-sacrifice/; www.kaironews.com/why-jammeh-is-kidnapping-children/; www.freedomnewspaper.com/breaking-news-yahya-jammeh-sacrifices-school-children-for-ritual-purposes-as-state-guard-vehicle-hits-school-bus/; www.freedomnewspaper.com/gambia-jammehs-malian-marabout-admits-being-assigned-by-jammeh-to-kill-gambians-for-him-on-the-road/; https://gambia.smbcgo.com/2016/11/07/brikama-parents-absents-children-school-missing-children-reports-increase/; https://gambia.smbcgo.com/2016/11/09/gambias-police-deny-children-snatched/; During the hiatus between Jammeh losing the election and finally conceding defeat, it was even rumoured that he had killed his rival Adama Barrow's own young son in a last act of spite; on 15 Jan Habibou Barrow, eight, was bitten to death by a stray dog, which was explained by some as the result of Jammeh's curse. Some even suggested that the 'dog' was really a shape-shifting witch in disguise, although if so the sorceress is now dead, the canine in question having been put down by Gambia's Agriculture Ministry on 1 Feb. See http://europe.newsweek.com/gambia-dog-killed-president-adama-barrows-son-put-down-551704?rm=eu

9 www.freedomnewspaper.com/gambia-weekend-bombshell-drops-at-the-state-house-nawec-waters-infested-by-jammehs-spiritual-water-ahead-of-polls/

10 *Times*, 21 & 23 Jan 2017. Statements from some officials involved in resolving the stand-off dispute that Jammeh has been given legal immunity from prosecution, though the above quotes clearly imply that he has.

THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

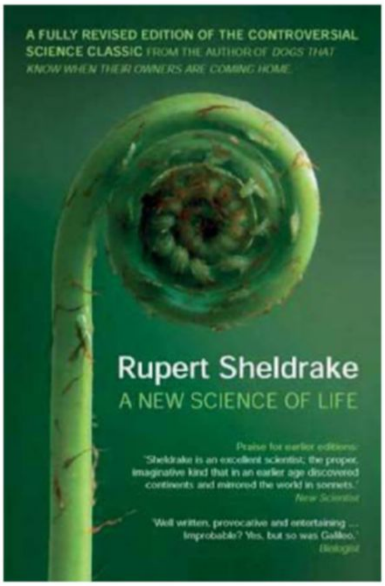
BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

21.HOW TO MAKE A SCIENTIST SQUAWK

You could say that Rupert Sheldrake's *A New Science of Life* started with an earthquake and worked up to a climax, as Sam Goldwyn is supposed to have demanded a good movie hould. The earthquake occurred not so much with the book's publication but with John Maddox editorialising in *Nature* (24 Sept 1981) that it was "the best candidate for burning there has been for many years". To be fair, at the close of the editorial Maddox drew back from his opening inflammatory rhetoric, saying that the "book should not be burned (not even confined to closed shelves in libraries) but, rather, put firmly in its place among the literature of intellectual aberrations." There have since been several climaxes or anti-climaxes, depending on how you take the results of experiments reported by Dr Sheldrake. The book has been through three editions, each somewhat different from the one before. Here we look at the latest.

In a way it was a surprise that (later Sir) John Maddox should have bothered to censure *A New Science of Life*, let alone devoted a second leader to it in *Nature*, generally reckoned the world's premier science publication. Such a book, one might think, would have been beneath the notice of so august a journal. But if one had ever had dealings with Maddox, it was a little less unexpected. He was known in some quarters of the Nuffield Foundation – of which he was director between 1975 and 1979 – as The Mad Ox, and not entirely without reason. One had the impression he would have felt quite ebullient on finding himself in a china shop. There was always something of the bully about him. Physically massive, he took advantage of his size and his resonant, expensively educated voice to dominate proceedings and on occasion to try to intimidate critics, and was sufficiently satisfied with his own opinions to find them difficult to change with any great haste. Some of those opinions were definitely weird. In a 1983 *Nature* editorial he opined that AIDS was a "perhaps non-existent condition", before it was firmly established what the disease actually was; one has yet to discover that he ever retracted this view.

In any case, *A New Science of Life* clearly bit Maddox in a memorable place and left a fearsome itch, for more than a dozen years later he defended his by-then notorious editorial to BBC TV thus: "Sheldrake is putting forward magic instead of science, and that can be condemned in exactly the language that the Pope used to condemn Galileo, and for the same reason. It is heresy." This rather peculiar remark is ambiguous in so far as it could be taken to imply that the Pope was right and Galileo wrong, and it's certainly a bit unnerving that Maddox should apply religious terms to science in this way, regardless of how right or wrong Sheldrake might be. Science, after all, is supposed to be about investigating the outlandish, and Sheldrake's ideas (or 'magic') are testable. And Maddox nursed at least one heresy of his own: he denounced Big Bang theory, partly on the grounds that it was the thin end of a wedge for Creationists – which is surely rather like saying one shouldn't discuss the *Shoah* on the grounds that it encourages antisemites and Holocaust-deniers.

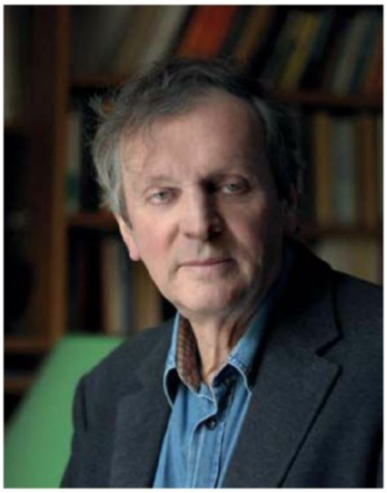

A FULLY REVISED EDITION OF THE CONTROVERSIAL SCIENCE CLASSIC FROM THE AUTHOR OF DOGS THAT KNOW WHEN THEIR OWNERS ARE COMING HOME
Rupert Sheldrake
A NEW SCIENCE OF LIFE
Praise for earlier editions:
'Sheldrake is an excellent scientist, the proper, imaginative kind that in an earlier age discovered continents and mirrored the world in sonnets.'
New Scientist
'Well written, provocative and entertaining ... Improbable? Yes, but so was Galileo.'
Biologist

But to the book itself. Sheldrake objects to the 'mechanical' or 'materialist' proposition that the shape or form of animals and plants is encoded in their DNA, since an arm and a liver or a stem and a pistil all contain the same DNA, and biologists cannot explain how arms and livers and so on turn out the way they do. Instead, they rely on a faith that one day they *will* know. Likewise with chemicals: no one quite knows why molecules form in the way they do, especially when it comes to allotropes of the same basic structure (e.g. carbon, which can be found as graphite or diamonds). Thus he proposes the existence of morphogenetic fields, which in combination with the science we know dictate the form of things, and this is based on the form they have taken in the past. Genes and chromosomes may dictate the aquilinity of one's nose, but your nose's nosiness and the reason it does not look or function like your gnarly big toe is because morphic resonance from countless noses before it shape it that way, while others ensure toes grow where they ought to.

The fields are immaterial but also may be based in some way in the physical world. Consider the development of an embryo. One set of morphic resonances may create a cell, which aggregates with others to form a node or 'chreode', which generates (or tunes in to) a new morphic field that organises the next stage of development, and so on. "In animal embryos," writes Sheldrake, "embryologists have identified many 'organising centres' that play a key role in the development of tissues and organs; one example is the apical ectodermal ridge at the tip of developing limb buds. These 'organising centres' may well be the germs with which the major morphogenetic fields become associated." Of course the objection may be raised that even in your average pussycat there must have been millions of the damn things at work to create the arrogant, opinionated and ungrateful creature that you love so well. In the human brain, let alone your liver, there may be millions more. How come there's room for them all on the morphic spectrum? And do they still resonate in and around us, holding us together?

Morphogenetic fields and morphic resonance operate regardless of space and time. They are also undetectable except through their effects, as are gravity and the electromagnetic spectrum. What made the first moggin or pig or garlic plant the way it is, and set up its morphogenetic field for later generations to follow, Sheldrake cannot say, offering chance, self-directed creativity (among animals), creativity inherent in the Universe, or a conscious transcendent entity by which all things in the Universe are created. Only chance is not metaphysical in nature, as Sheldrake makes clear. The notion that morphology is unconstrained by space or time and is a kind of 'species memory' leads Sheldrake to the yet more radical idea that memory, and all other functions normally associated with the brain, is not actually *within* the brain but somewhere else. The brain is like a radio or TV set, receiving data from elsewhere. We know there is not, as children amuse their parents by thinking, a little man inside the radio reading the news. Likewise, the brain 'tunes in' to memories, and indeed may tune in to other minds: hence telepathy. At such extensions of morphic resonance, logical though they are given the premises, many a scientist has rolled his eyes. And Sheldrake has probably done himself few favours since by attempting to investigate, and believing he has demonstrated, the telepathic powers of a parrot, of all things. (See **FT145:26**. The online Skeptics' Dictionary has a full rundown of the case, which isn't mentioned in the book, with both sides of the argument represented: start by looking up N'kisi.)

For a fortean it is difficult to decide if his 'hypothesis of formative causation' is cranky pseudo-science or if Sheldrake is on to something – not that forteans are obliged to decide anything, and in any case crank science is nothing if not entertaining. There are at least two things in Sheldrake's favour, apart from his indubitable scientific credentials and erudition: his various proposals for experiments that would confirm or refute his hypotheses, and the several examples he gives of morphogenesis apparently in action. John Maddox considered that Sheldrake's declaring his hypothesis to be testable and falsifiable preposterous, and his proposed experiments time-consuming, and some in this edition would indeed be complicated, and costly too. But Sheldrake is an honest scientist and points out the pitfalls and difficulties of his proposals as he sees them. One problem, as with many another renegade theory, is that various scientists would no doubt find it fascinating and fun to run such tests, but wouldn't get the funding from the orthodox establishment, don't have that much spare time, or reject the notion *a priori*. One thinks of Michael Roll and Ronald Pearson, and their claim that they'd shown Einstein wrong, and in a way that proved the existence of an afterlife. Professor Archie Roy's retort to the suggestion that someone suitably qualified run Pearson's funny equations and see what came out the other end was: "We'd have to rewrite the whole of celestial mechanics." And Archie Roy, sometime President of the SPR, was no stranger to the fringy world of the paranormal and odd hypotheses.


ETIENNE GILFILLAN

> "A TRULY GREAT LIBRARY CONTAINS SOMETHING IN IT TO OFFEND EVERYONE."
>
> *Jo Godwin*

Sheldrake reports on various experiments that might have indicated the existence of morphogenetic fields. The major problem with the results centres on the murky, esoteric world of statistics, at a level that the book understandably doesn't explore but whose detail can be found online (see Shedrake's website – he is not averse to hosting trenchant criticism). Sheldrake interprets the numbers one way, his critics diametrically differently. This leaves the layman bemused or simply plumping for the prejudice of his choice. More research is needed, as every academic paper insists about everything – not to mention thoroughly unambiguous results.

Far more fun to read are Sheldrake's accounts of apparent examples of morphogenetic fields in action. Perhaps the most suggestive concerns US Army tests for IQ among would-be recruits. "I realised that if morphic resonance occurs, average performance in IQ tests should be rising, not because people are becoming more intelligent, but because they should be getting easier to do as a result of morphic resonance from the millions who have done them before. I was therefore intrigued… by finding that average IQ test scores in Japan had been increasing by three per cent a decade since the Second World War." And the US military had used exactly the same IQ test since 1918. Then, the average score was a little over 75 in 1989 values (average IQ, i.e. the 1989 value, is always taken to be 100). So in seven decades there had been an 'improvement' of around 25 per cent in performance. Then there is the curious affair of the melting points of crystals. Newly created chemical compounds are notoriously difficult to crystallise, and in theory, if morphic resonance is at work, *should* crystallise more easily and quickly as the process is repeated. A chemist pointed out to Sheldrake that, if so, the melting point of the given crystals should also rise over time (he does not explain why). This is precisely what Sheldrake found was happening, and gives a host of instances and compares them with the steady state of crystals that have formed naturally over millions of years. The standard, that is sceptical, interpretation is that samples of new compounds have increased in purity. Sheldrake proposes a simple experiment to discover how true this is.

Some of Sheldrake's assumptions don't appear to hold up. While he ascribes the ease with which babes pick up their native languages to morphic resonance, this is harder (we say from real-life observation) to justify when applied to learning a second language outside a bi- or mutilingual family setting. Some people seem to be natural linguists; others find it a struggle to navigate the new world a new tongue represents. And so much depends on the attitude and approach of the teacher. More research needed here, too.

This is a dense book in parts, and it helps to come to it armed with some basic genetic knowledge, or at least vocabulary. It's a fortean classic because its propositions are still open to question and/or proof, quite apart from the choleric reaction of John Maddox. And read on, and you'll find out the importance of epigenetics, and why, despite having them snipped off for about 4,000 years, little Jewish boys are still born with foreskins.

For an interview with Rupert Sheldrake, see **FT286:38-40**.

Rupert Sheldrake, *A New Science of Life: The Hypothesis of Formative Causation* (third, revised edition), Icon Books 2009.

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Judaism's lycanthropic theologians

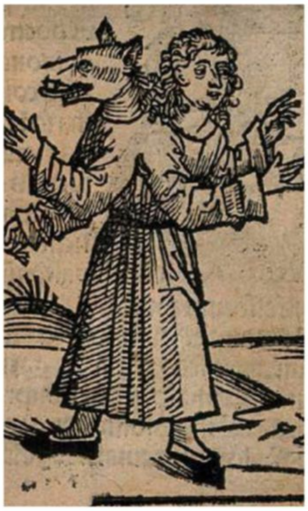
IAN SIMMONS explores the somewhat surprising place occupied by werewolves in mediæval Jewish thought.

In late 2014 the *Jerusalem Post* ran a peculiar story claiming that Argentine President Christina Fernandez de Kirschner had adopted the son of a Jewish family, Yair Tawil, in order to prevent the boy becoming a werewolf.[1] As wonderful as this idea sounded, it turned out to be complete rubbish.[2] The story had come about through the confusion of an odd Argentine convention, by which the seventh child of any Argentine family is eligible to become the godchild of the president, with the Guarani people's legend of the Lobizón, a South American version of the werewolf. If you are a Lobizón, you apparently turn into a mixture of a pig and a dog every Tuesday and Friday night; and, it seems, the seventh son of a seventh son is at greater risk than most of becoming a Lobizón. What this peculiar little tale did highlight, though, was the long-standing connection between Judaism and werewolves.

In the 12th and 13th century, the Pietist school of Jewish philosophy flourished in what is now Germany, with prominent thinkers like Rabbi Eleazar of Worms and Rabbi Judah the Pious of Speyer writing prolifically on morality and theology. In doing so they incorporated many elements of their local culture into their thought, among which was the widespread belief in werewolves. These elements were long dismissed as 'local colour' with no significant bearing on the actual theological content of their work, but recently this has been disputed, particularly by scholar David L Shyovitz.[3] In his research on the Pietists, Shyovitz realised that the rabbis were not just invoking monsters at random but were incorporating particular folkloric elements because they proved "good to think with" in relation to certain aspects of theology they wished to illuminate. Werewolves, it seems, were particularly useful when it came to exploring the spiritual significance of human corporeality.

For the Pietists, the human body is a microcosm of the created order as a whole, and is indelibly linked to the soul. For this theological 'as above, so below' model to work, though, a stable, intact human body is essential. A werewolf, by undergoing the lycanthropic transmutation, demonstrates that the body is not stable and can be rendered fluid in order to transform it into something utterly different – which presents a direct challenge to this theological position. This was a serious theological problem requiring urgent resolution, and the result was a strand of specifically 'lycanthropic' Pietist theology.

This approach explored whether the lycanthropic transformation involved a complete change from human to animal. The conclusion was that it did not – because the werewolf's eyeballs remained the same, and thus some element of fundamental stability was conserved. This idea was then used to reflect upon more fundamental theological questions, such as how a previously bipedal snake could be transformed into something that crawls on the ground after God curses it for tempting Eve in Genesis 3:14. Again, this was possible because the eyes remained unchanged, ensuring material continuity.



LEFT: A creature with the heads of a wolf and a human, c.1495.

The human body is a microcosm of the created order as a whole

The werewolf helped throw light on other thorny problems – most notably how it was possible for people to ascend to Heaven as angels without dying first, as Enoch and Elijah had managed to do. For Pietists this was possible because these prophets had angelic nature as part of their being – it was simply hidden until that moment. This was much like the werewolf, whose wolf nature remains hidden until it is triggered. Most surprising, though, was the Pietist interpretation of a blessing Jacob gives to his son Benjamin in Genesis 49:27: "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours his prey, and in the evening he divides the spoils". A Pietist commentator concluded that this meant Benjamin was himself a werewolf, and then went on to interpret Moses's address to the tribe of Benjamin in Deutronomy 3:12 ("To Benjamin he said: May the beloved of God dwell securely upon Him; He encompasses him throughout the day, and he dwells between His shoulders") to mean that the legs of the werewolf burst out between a man's shoulders. He also takes a passage in Genesis 44 where Jacob expresses reluctance to let Benjamin leave his company, as meaning that he turns into a wolf on doing so. This further prompted him to use verses from Deutronomy to suggest a way in which to counter werewolves, a method involving the casting of ashes, and goes on to draw wider conclusions about lycanthropy from the text. He notes that pure animals are born without upper teeth, but wolves are not, so werewolves can be identified at birth by the possession of teeth – as well as the fact that they possess tails, even when in human form, because of the continuity of physical being. He also suggests the werewolf may be neutralised by pulling his teeth and severing his tail when in human form.

This theological approach relied on the belief in the existence of werewolves, and faded as they became less credible, but it gave form to the intrinsic unease that the idea of shape-shifting produces. I doubt, somehow, there will ever be a theological exegesis based on zombies – somehow they lack the rich ambiguity the werewolf once provided.

NOTES

[1] *Jerusalem Post*, 28 Nov 2014: www.jpost.com/Diaspora/Argentinas-president-adopts-Jewish-godson-to-counteract-werewolf-legend-385931

[2] *Guardian*, 29 Dec 2014: www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/29/argentina-kirchner-adopt-child-werewolf

[3] David I Shyovitz, "Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Werewolf Renaissance", *Journal Of The History Of Ideas*, October 2014, 75(4), pp521-43.

IAN SIMMONS is a regular contributor to FT and Communications Director of the Life Science Centre in Newcastle upon Tyne.

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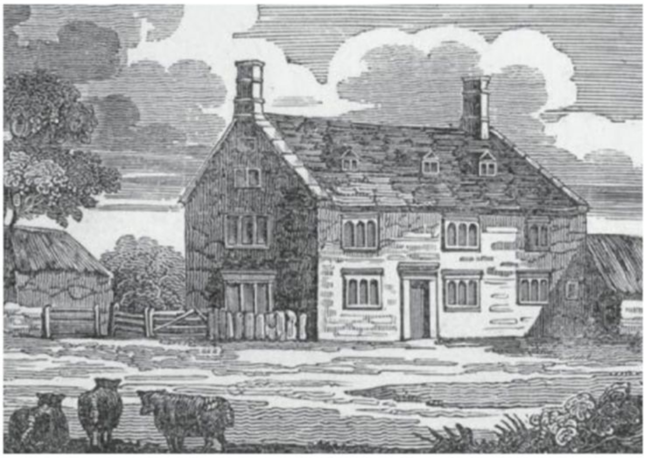
Premature babies, geniuses & gods

EDWARD DUTTON asks whether the disadvantages of being a 'preemie' are outweighed by the chance of turning out a genius.

On Christmas Day 1643, a miracle took place in a small Lincolnshire hamlet. Hannah, widowed three months earlier, gave birth to a baby boy. The boy was roughly two months premature. He was so small he could fit into a "quart glass". Everyone expected the tiny little lad to die within weeks, but he somehow pulled through.

He pulled through, but he wasn't normal. With his delicate skull, he would have suffered brain damage during the birth process, causing other parts of his brain to compensate. He grew up to have a very small head and to be only 5ft 6in (1.68m) tall – short for a man from a wealthy, yeoman farmer background. He was also a very unusual person. Deeply unpleasant, he had few friends, no romantic relationships, was a religious zealot, and once threatened to burn his mother's house down with her in it. He would remain lost in thought for hours when hosting guests, he was left-handed, and he almost failed his degree – but he was also possessed of incredible intelligence.

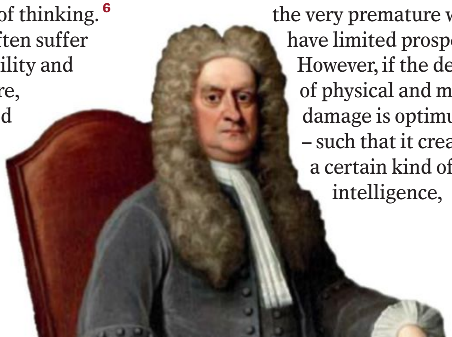
This miracle baby was Isaac Newton. He grew up to develop the typical 'genius' profile: extremely high but narrow intelligence. He was brilliant at maths but hardly ever spoke, and couldn't perform simple farming tasks. He possessed moderately low empathy, meaning he didn't care about people or if his ideas offended them, and moderately low impulse control, meaning he did not play by the rules but could think outside the box and dedicate himself to his work.



ABOVE: The house in which Isaac Newton (below) was born – two months early.

A big part of this could be down to possible, but unlikely, genetic combinations (as intelligence is about 80 per cent genetic and personality up to 70 per cent).[1] But it is likely no coincidence that Newton was born two months early. Prematurity (defined as being born more than three weeks ahead of schedule) is associated with autism, [2] aspects of which can clearly be seen in the typical genius. It causes reduced IQ, but this often reflects damage to one aspect of IQ (such as spatial IQ) with other aspects being high due to the complex way in which the brain compensates for damaged areas.[3] Many savants, who have low IQ but brilliant though narrow intelligence are premature. [4] One study found that 54 per cent of extreme 'preemies' were left-handed, compared to 8 per cent of controls. [5] Left-handedness means something has gone wrong in brain development, but this leads to different parts of the brain being used, and thus to unusual ways of thinking. [6] Pre-termers often suffer physical disability and reduced stature, which may lead to bullying. Prematurity is also associated with depression.[7] This is due to less 'myelin' on the temporal lobes, [8] and also mothers with congenitally anxious personalities being more likely to miscarry. Depression and anxiety are themsleves associated with religious or artistic experiences, becoming a charismatic leader, or seeing the world in esoteric or unusual ways.[9] So, even though prematurity is one of the biggest predictors of poor life outcomes, it seems quite likely that an aspect of Newton's genius lies in the fact that he was born two months early. In many cases, the very premature will have limited prospects. However, if the degree of physical and mental damage is optimum – such that it creates a certain kind of intelligence, combined with a certain kind of personality – then that's a different story.

> *It seems likely that an aspect of Newton's genius lies in the fact he was born early*



Using the key words 'famous,' 'premature' and 'preterm,' a Google search unearths an astonishing number of scientific, literary or musical geniuses or charismatic figures who were born early. Charismatic and artistic figures have similar kinds of personalities to scientific geniuses.[10] However, they are more likely to suffer from depression.[11] This is associated with religious and other unusual psychological experiences and a consequent ability to inspire other people.

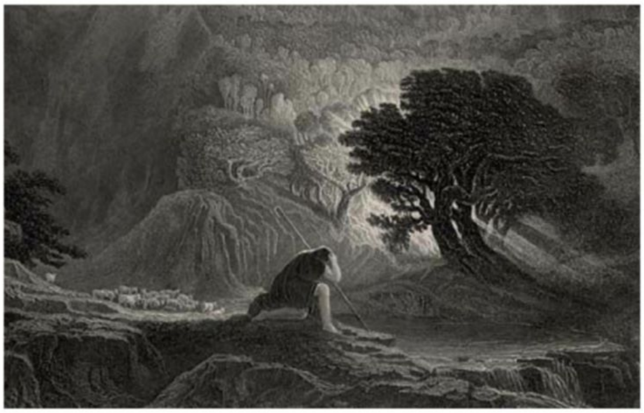
For scientists, there is Kepler (two months early), Newton, Einstein and Darwin. For charismatic figures, there is Churchill (two months), Charles Wesley, King George III (two months), Napoleon, Hungarian revolutionary Imre Nagy, and Warren Jeffs (two months), leader of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Saints, a cultish split from the Mormons (see **FT347:36-43**). Artistic types include Keats, Victor Hugo, Anna Pavlova (two months), Rousseau, Picasso, Thomas Hobbes, Mark Twain (two months), and the musician Stevie Wonder (six weeks). Of course, many 'preemies' are far less eminent, but it seems an extraordinary coincidence that so many ground-breaking figures were born early and that their very prematurity could partly help to explain why they were ground-breaking.

Even in ancient times, preemies who survived childhood were observed to be somehow 'different' in a way that could be both frightening and inspiring. They seemed possessed and capable of great achievement. Moses, the pioneering founder of Judaism, was born, according to tradition, three months early. He would have had only a 25 per cent chance of survival as recently as 1980, at the Hammersmith Hospital in London. [12] He was

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

born during the persecution of the enslaved Hebrews, when the Pharaoh had ordered that all newborn Hebrew babies be killed. His mother, Jochebed, could keep his birth secret because he didn't cry, possibly because he had under-developed lungs. The kind of personality he developed is fairly clear: low impulse control, low agreeableness, mental instability. After murdering a slave master, Moses had a vision of God in the 'Burning Bush', freed the Hebrew slaves and led them to the Promised Land. He established a theocracy with brutal punishments for dissent and massacred other tribes that worshipped a different god. He was the stereotypical charismatic leader: self-driven, rule-breaking, mentally unstable and so prone to religious fervour. His prematurity almost undoubtedly contributed to this kind of personality.

Every religion seems to have a similar figure. Mohammed's grandson, Hussein, the founder of Shia Islam, was a preemie, which his followers regarded as miraculous. Buddha was born early, and Jesus may have been, as his mother went into labour after an arduous journey and, surely, wouldn't have travelled when heavily pregnant. Balarama, the elder brother of Krishna, was a pre-termer and is considered the eighth manifestation of the god Vishnu. Dionysus, the Greek God of wine, ritual madness and epiphany, was also supposedly born prematurely, the son of Zeus and a mortal mother. According to Greek myth, Dionysus had been struck with madness by Hera. He spent his life conquering most of the world and teaching it how to make wine. He was the only Olympian who could descend into Hades and bring the dead to Mount Olympus. If we accept the ideas of the historian Euhemerus – that the Greek gods were based on real people – Dionysus is the typical charismatic. He is mad, fearless, prone to unusual psychological experiences, and a great leader of men. Many of these unusual characteristics would be predicted by his prematurity. Horus, the Egyptian god of war and hunting, was born prematurely to the goddess Isis. His evil uncle Seth was also born preterm, because he tore a hole in his mother's womb. In Welsh mythology, the god and war hero Lleu Law Gyffes ('bright one of the skilful hand') was born early, as was Cullun, the 'Hound of Ulster', in Irish myth. Short in stature and son of the god Lugh, his life roughly parallels that of Hercules, which may suggest a common Indo-European origin for the story. By coincidence, Eurystheus, born prematurely as well, competed with Hercules to perform the 'Twelve Tasks' and lost, taking his revenge by trying to kill Hercules's children. So, in many different mythologies there is a similar theme: pre-termers are crazed, inspired geniuses.



ABOVE: Celebrated OT 'preemie' Moses sees God in the burning bush.

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

A related portrayal can be found in folklore and even Early Modern literature. In Eastern European folklore, one of the characteristics that made a person likely to become a vampire was preterm birth. Caliban in *The Tempest* is described as a 'mooncalf', a concept stemming from the belief that the insane or physically disabled were born prematurely, perhaps due to malign lunar influence.[13] In *Richard III*, Shakespeare strongly implies that the title character – whom he portrays as a deformed, evil, scheming despot – was born preterm. Lady Anne curses Richard's father, saying: "If he ever has a child, let it be born prematurely, and let it look like a monster – so ugly and unnatural that the sight of it frightens its own mother." Shakespeare's Richard is indeed born "deformed, unfinished, sent before my time". For Elizabethans, surviving pre-termers were stereotyped as mad, bad, and dangerous.

Despite the subtle differences, there is a clear thread running all the way from ancient myth through to the modern world. Being born significantly early seems to be associated with madness and disability on the one hand, but genius and charisma (a kind of positive madness) on the other, presumably when the combination of intelligence and brain damage is optimum. This fits with evidence that prematurity is associated with Asperger's, autism, and depression; and genius and charisma are, in turn, associated with these characteristics.

I have to confess a personal interest here. I was born 13 weeks early in 1980, weighing 2.5 pounds. I spent my first two months in an incubator. When I was 20, my father told me that I'd almost died – something I'd never realised and which had obviously been a trauma for my parents. I walked like "a thunderbird" or "a spastic" (depends on which school bully you ask) until I was at least 13. I still walk with a limp. I was terrible at PE; I'm a southpaw; I had problems empathising with people as a child; I am easily over-stimulated; and I have very bad spatial intelligence (and have, therefore, never learnt to drive). On the other hand, I've long been interested in the fortean and in controversial areas of research. So, maybe I fit some of the bill. It's nice to know that not all of us 'preemies' can be written off. Quite a few of us even seem to become gods!

EDWARD DUTTON is the author, with Bruce Charlton, of The Genius Famine *(Buckingham University Press, 2015).*

NOTES

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You must remember this…

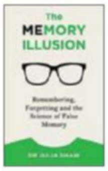
Fortean researchers need to bear in mind the fact that our memories are malleable, and prone to group-think and accepting false claims; fortunately, this flexibility has an upside too…

The Memory Illusion

Dr Julia Shaw

Random House Books 2016

Pb, 288pp, notes, ind, £14.99



Ever since Pythagoras's command to "know thyself", there have been many ideas about the nature of memory and self, and theories about how it works. Now, it seems, much of what we think about ourselves and our memories is wrong… Dr Julia Shaw – a 'memory hacker' studying "the science of false memory" at London South Bank University – tells us "the many ways in which our memories can betray us, and why you may not be who you think you are". One major obstacle to a better understanding of memory was the belief that our minds begin as a 'blank slate' before collecting chunks of sensory data that, if we could only access them efficiently from somewhere in the depths of our skulls, preserve a pristine record of all we have done, thought and experienced, accurate in every detail. Some people – spies, memory champions and *savants* of different types – seem able to access these personal archives; their talents are discussed in chapters on brain physiology and neuropharmacology (e.g., anti-depressants and 'truth' drugs), along with mnemonic techniques (such as the 'memory palace'), or recalling formulæ (such as what day of the week an ancient date was). Yet each of us knows through our own daily experience how error-prone our memories can be, and concludes that 'perfect recall' must be a rare thing indeed.

Sometimes a memory anomaly is minor, such as when I arrive at my door with little recollection of the bus and walk taken after leaving the train station. But when a memory process goes wrong, the consequences can be dramatic and dangerous. Forteans will recognise puzzling memory-related phenomena of recent years: memories of 'satanic abuse', past lives and alien abductions (especially those recovered by hypnosis); 'entities' expressed as multiple personalities or spirit possession; remote viewing (especially where this is done in guided or dream sessions); or synæsthesia (in which sensory or memory objects are reviewed in other than a normal sense, e.g. numbers perceived as colours).

These and other related phenomena are discussed; importantly, the processes of both recording and remembering are prone to create variations of a memory, some of which may range from 'unreliable' to 'untrue'. More seriously, memories are shown to be open to unconscious manipulation, confabulation and even invention, in that they can be 'memories' of things that were experienced only indirectly from things we were told or heard).

The legal profession has largely abandoned hypnosis to eliciting supposedly accurate memories due to the highly suggestible nature of this state of consciousness. More recently, the use of hypnosis (and guided 'recollection and dreaming') to recover so-called lost or 'false' memories has been shown to be just as unreliable. (This does little to help those whose lives were ruined in the late 1970s and 80s, when well-intentioned psychologists and therapists resorted to hypnosis or other 'guided' recall techniques to elicit supposed 'repressed' memories.) Apparently, simple repetition – whether in everyday conversation, during police interrogation, or on a therapist's couch – is enough to reinforce a 'false' memory.

> *"Memories are open to unconscious manipulation, confabulation and even invention"*

Shaw lays out, clearly and simply, how memories are not 'archived' in a persistent form as previously thought, but are volatile and malleable. The impression of a memory is a creative interaction with the brain structure, and the act of remembering can change that memory just as easily. If our sense of self is based upon our memories, what implications does this have for the stability of our identity? There is an amusing discussion about people who claim to remember their early days – some even recall life in the womb. Shaw shows how such unlikely memories can come about (unlikely, because the brain structure at that age is simply too immature).

Other topics include: cognitive biases; working and long-term memory; criminology (one of her experiments was implanting erroneous memories of a non-existent crime); the physiology of perception; subliminal learning; the effects of emotions on memory retention; and the role of fantasy and magical realism. Among her many case studies are people who believed they witnessed the 9/11 New York and the 7/7 London bombings, and the assassination of JFK. "To me," she writes, "and to other researchers who have done similar work, this suggests that richly detailed false memories of important life events can probably be created in just about anyone, given the right circumstances." I remember being confronted with 'facts' about my own past that were proven to be wrong; it was quite disconcerting.

Perhaps the most disturbing discovery in memory science is the extent to which our memories can remake themselves to conform to a consensus. Shaw explains complex group experiments that clearly show how some memories can shift so that someone may remember something the majority affirms happened but *didn't*, and may even believe a demonstrably untrue fact. The extent to which one's self-control (already fickle) can be surrendered to the group is frightening. Consider what Ignatius of Loyola said about Christian obedience: "What seems to me white, I will believe black if the hierarchical Church so defines." Shaw's other examples of this mental malleability have relevance to social media, which are driven by rumour and false or unconfirmed attributions. Forteans will realise how this has had awful consequences throughout history in the (often fatal if not simply life-ruining) form of panics, mass hysteria and prejudice (most horribly manifested in hate crimes and the centuries of witch murdering).

If our memories are, as Shaw is

Continued on page 60

A philosopher fortean

Author Colin Wilson threw off the label of Angry Young Man to become a populariser of modern philosophy and fortean tropes

Beyond the Robot

The Life and Work of Colin Wilson

Gary Lachman

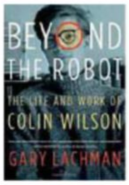
TarcherPerigree 2016

Pb, 400pp, $26, notes, ind

Colin Wilson was something of a rarity: an optimistic existentialist. Even more of a contradiction, he was an existentialist who looked to the spiritual and even the paranormal. Halfway through Gary Lachman's biography, Wilson starts writing about esoteric subjects; his 1971 book *The Occult* was by far his most successful work since *The Outsider* in 1956 first marked him, at 24, as an Angry Young Man, a label he spent the next decade trying to shake off.

Lachman's book is subtitled 'The Life and Work of Colin Wilson', but apart from the early pages, which catalogue Wilson's endless succession of dead-end jobs, awkward relationships and unsuitable lodgings before the publication of *The Outsider*, most of it is about his work, and the content of his work – and because Wilson was a popular philosopher, this makes it a study of the development of his ideas. And because many of his ideas build on or challenge the ideas of other thinkers, we're given something of a grounding in Nietsche, Shaw, Sartre, Husserl, Whitehead and many more. In places, *Beyond the Robot* is more of a philosophy textbook than a biography.

Many of Wilson's teachings seem to be applied common sense. If an aggravating problem is solved, we feel more of a burst of joy than if the world is simply ticking along pleasantly. A lot of the time our lives seem to run on automatic – the robot of the title; we need to take more control of who we are and what we experience. Sometimes we seem to be bright and alive and the world is in full colour and beautiful; how can we get more of these peak experiences?



Gary Lachman has become a highly respected biographer of esoteric thinkers of the last century or so – Blavatsky, Crowley, Steiner, Ouspensky. There's no doubt that he knows his stuff, and it's clear he has great respect for those whose lifework he explores. But there can be dangers in being too close to your subject matter. Lachman declares himself a "Wilson fan" and calls Wilson "a mentor and a friend". Wilson is famous for describing himself as a genius; a biography really should explore, challenge and test this claim. Lachman seems to accept it as fact. *Beyond the Robot* may not be a hagiography, but it does risk being too uncritical. There's only one paragraph in the whole book touching briefly on Wilson's politics – he once supported Thatcher – but omitting to mention he'd had views much further to the right. Until the last few pages there's no critical treatment of any of his books, though Lachman does quote others saying that Wilson wrote far too much – well over 100 books, non-fiction and fiction – and that this must inevitably have an effect on the quality of his work. (It did.)

Wilson wrote that he had known since his teens "that I've got something terribly important to do". Most readers would see an arrogance, or blindness, or both, about his disparaging, even belittling response to critics of his work. What he was writing "hadn't been understood yet" because "The English are totally brainless." Lachman reports this with no comment.

Similarly, there's no comment about Wilson's naivety on, for just one example, synchronicity. Wilson had been writing about an obscure group, then saw a book lying on his camp-bed, and amazingly it had a section on the group! Clearly if it was on his camp-bed he'd been looking at it recently, so there's nothing in the slightest weird about this except what's going on in Wilson's head.

From *The Occult* onwards Wilson explored and seemed to accept a wide spread of esoteric, paranormal and pseudo-scientific ideas, writing on everything from life after death to UFO abductions to Atlantis to Rennes-le-Château to the Akashic Records to psychometry – reading the psychic "residue" on objects – to remote viewing. Again Lachman relates Wilson's researches and writings uncritically, when some assessment of their validity and worth might have been expected; after all, he examines the foundations of Wilson's philosophical writings in great depth.

I'd like to have seen more on Wilson's fiction; it's mentioned from time to time, but rarely in much detail. It would have been useful to have had a chronological bibliography of Wilson's books; this would have provided the reader with a much-needed order and structure to his massive output. It's also incredibly unhelpful that Wilson's own titles aren't included in the index, so it's impossible to look up any individual work. In fact the bibliography only lists other people's names, so you can't even look for key Wilsonian concepts like "Factor X".

David V Barrett

★★★☆☆

fond of telling us, not only fallible but "nothing but an illusion", is there any good news? Yes, she writes: "without this flexibility, we would be unable to learn. We would always be stuck with old memories. Instead, we are able to rewrite information when better information comes along. We can learn from our mistakes." The plasticity of our brain cells allows us to think creatively, abstractly and imaginatively "by making associations between things that didn't happen in real life, and it allows us to solve puzzles by thinking about many different possible solutions." As we forteans research, interview and investigate, we need to take these matters into account. Simply "believing the witness" – as was advocated about child witnesses to 'Satanic Ritual Abuse' – should not mean mistaking eye-witness testimony for 'truth' without question or qualification. In *Lo!* (1931), Charles Fort summarised the issue thus: "Why don't they see, when, sometimes magnificently, there is something to see? The answer is the same as the answer to another question. Why, sometimes, do they see when there is nothing to see?" As this book explains brilliantly, the answer lies in the relationship between memory and imagination.

Bob Rickard

★★★★☆

Furry Logic

The Physics of Animal Life

Matin Durrani & Liz Kalaugher

Bloomsbury Sigma 2016

Hb, 304pp, illus, ind, £16.99

If it's green and wriggles, it's biology. If it bubbles and stinks, it's chemistry. If you don't understand a bloody word, it's physics. Martin Durrani and Liz Kalaugher lay this old adage to rest. *Furry Logic* offers an accessible, entertaining and informative introduction to biophysics. And you'll understand every word – even if you don't know the difference between kleptothermy and infrasound. (You will by the end of the book.)

Furry Logic uses a menagerie – from the mating habits of red-sided garter snakes, to how the harlequin mantis shrimp kills crabs, to how dogs shake themselves dry, to the flight of the bumblebee – to illustrate how physics helps animal survive. A dog shaking itself dry after a dip in the sea exhibits 'simple

harmonic motion’. That’s the same motion as “when a mass on a spring bobs up and down”. Bees, famously, should crash; at least according to standard aerodynamics using fixed wings. But a bee’s wing isn’t fixed. So, a bee generates vortices that keep it aloft. Such examples – and *Furry Logic* includes many more – are fascinating for anyone with even a passing interest in the natural world.

Furry Logic is almost conversational in style – which is one reason it’s easy to read. It includes asides such as: “Before we leave mosquitoes, there’s just one more thing as detective Colombo used to say in the 1970s TV series.” “Still, note to self: do not mess with the mantis shrimp”. But the book manages to balance on the fine line the between scientific detail and literary populism.

Unfortunately, the book lacks references or further reading. On several occasions, I wanted to read the original paper. OK you can Google, but it’s far easier to look up a particular paper. Indeed, I suspect that many readers might want to discover more.

Mention physics to many people and their eyes glaze over. By starting with something we all know (a dog shaking itself or a cat lapping water), Durrani and Kalaugher achieve the difficult task of making physics understandable and accessible. I’ll have to find a new adage.

Mark Greener

★★★★☆

Ancient Aliens

The Official Companion Book

Foreword by Kevin Burns

Harper Elixir 2016

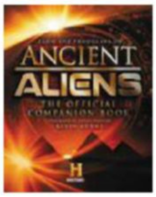
Hb, 210pp, illus, £15.90

The History Channel’s hit TV series takes us on a breathtaking journey into the past to show us extraterrestrials visited our planet and educated our early ancestors. Now you can enjoy this companion book during the commercial breaks.

We get chapters by all the leading fantasy merchants, or as the dustjacket blurb puts it, “from the greatest minds of ancient alien theory”. So it kicks off with Erich von Däniken, who claims Ezekiel was abducted by extraterrestrials who took him to a temple and made him measure it with a strange device.

Apparently, you can construct a building based on these dimensions. Not sure why.

Giorgio A Tsoukalos considers why there are so many ancient pyramid structures throughout the world and wonders how humanity suddenly gained “extraordinary engineering capabilities”. The answer is, the Guardians from the Sky (extraterrestrials) taught them. But why build these structures? Tsoukalos isn’t certain, but suggests they wirelessly distributed power across the globe.



He’s more confident that these ancient pyramids align with the Orion and Sirius constellations because there is a “strong possibility” these are the locations the extraterrestrials originated from. He even notes that people have spotted pyramids and what looks like the Sphinx on Mars, indicating that this is another origin of the ETs. He’s obviously failed to notice they have long been explained as natural formations.

The other ancient mysteries are dealt with in an equal fashion… David Hatcher Childress says the Nazca Lines were built to attract any ETs flying over in their aircraft and in effect said to them, “Here we are. Land here”. That sounds fair enough, though he goes up a gear when he says that they did this because originally the Anunnaki space gods used Nazca as a spaceport, and the people wanted them to come back.

Jason Martell details more about the Anunnaki and how they came to Earth to seek gold and other resources to repair their planet’s atmosphere. The mining of Earth was so laborious and tough that the Anunnaki rebelled, and in response their leaders created human beings to act as their slaves.

Then we get the Mayans, the tomb of the Palenque astronaut, more megalithic marvels, Easter Island, the Chinese Dropa stones, sacred relics, the Ark of the Covenant. The usual AA stuff basically, with lots of beautiful layouts and colour illustrations.

In his chapter ‘The Powers of Myth’, psychologist Jonathan Young surveys the many creation stories of the ancient past and brings us down from the heady heights of speculation, to the viewpoint that “These stories continue to this day, only in different form: the divine being becomes an ET or somebody from another dimension.”

David Wilcock quickly returns us to the speculation highway. Taking the baton from Tsoukalos, he states that ancient structures are positioned on a worldwide grid system. They sit on the intersection points of these grids to harness the power of the spin field in Earth’s gravity. He also suggests that UFOs tap into this energy and uses Aime Michel’s disputed book *Flying Saucers and the Straight-Line Mystery* to back up his claims.

Perhaps we can get more sense from ‘world-renowned researcher and investigative reporter’ Linda Moulton Howe. She tells us Roswell was caused by two ET craft crashing into a weather balloon and the US government knows all about the alien threat. Her sources? Philip J Corso’s *The Day After Roswell* and the Majestic 12 documents. Need I say more?

Nick Pope pops in with something about the Rendlesham Incident blah blah blah – “I’m not saying that this thing was extraterrestrial”. William Henry concludes that our ET visitors were actually “stargate-traveling time travelers” and tongue-twisting blighters in the process.

Like the series itself, this is a crowd-pleasing book. In the foreword, series creator Kevin Burns addresses the issue of peddling pseudoscience mixed with pseudohistory.

He explains it is not the producers who say ETs came to us in the past; “it is the ancient astronaut theorists in the program who suggest that.”

Hmmm… So the producers are innocent bystanders who switch off their brains in the presence of astronaut theorists, and just happen to make a few bucks from making the gullible public happy.

Sounds reasonable enough to me.

Nigel Watson

★★★☆☆

Fairy Tales for the Disillusioned

Enchanted Stories from the French Decadent Tradition

Eds: Gretchen Schultz & Lewis Seifert

Princeton University Press 2016

Hb, 255pp, illus, notes, bib, £18.95

Fairy Tales for the Disillusioned contains translations of over 30 fairy tales re-interpreted by writers of the French Decadent tradition. These late 19th and early 20th century tales feel very contemporary, with cynicism, consequences, literal outcomes and shifting genders. They would not look out of place beside Angela Carter’s work, or the anthologies edited by Ellen Datlow and Terry Windling.

Here you’ll find solitary fairies encountering modernity and finding their magic abilities surpassed by technology (with echoes of Clarke’s third law). In ‘The Wish Granted Alas’, Lise de Belvelize asks a fairy to make her “as miraculously charming as she was in her lover’s poems”, and finds herself transformed into a living metaphor, with a rose for a mouth, and literal sapphires for eyes. By contrast, ‘Cinderella, the Humble and Haughty Child’, written in 1925 by Claude Cahun, explores the complexities of dominant/submissive relationships and shoe fetishism.

The stories in *Fairy Tales for the Disillusioned*, most translated for the first time, help us to grasp the attitude to folklore at the turn of the 20th century. They also develop an understanding of how this rebranding of traditional tales responds to the white-hot blade of technological and societal change.

An entertaining, engaging and educational collection.

Steve Toase

★★★★☆

Did dastard Don do it?

The unsolved murder of a Victorian prostitute known as 'the Countess' is re-examined, and 'the Foreigner' is the suspect…

The Ripper of Waterloo Road

The Murder of Eliza Grimwood in 1838

Jan Bondeson

The History Press 2017

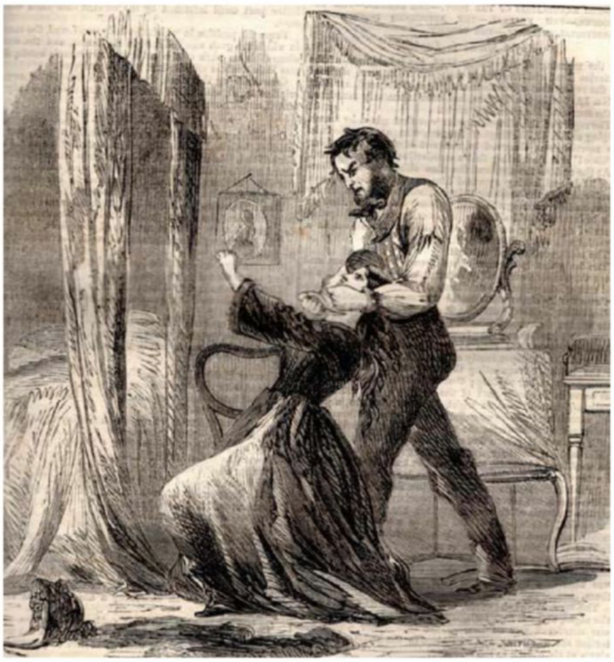
Hb, 288pp, illus, ind, £20

It's Friday 26 May 1838, at London's fashionable Strand Theatre, and the evening's performance is just coming to an end. Eliza Grimwood, a popular and strikingly attractive 31-year-old representative of the city's better class of prostitute, catches sight of her pre-arranged date. He is a dapperly dressed gentleman of saturnine appearance, with long dark whiskers, who speaks in educated tones, with just a slight accent suggestive of French or Italian descent. The couple leave the theatre together, travelling the short distance over Waterloo Bridge to Eliza's home at 12 Wellington Terrace in a hansom cab. To their driver, they appear affectionate and relaxed in each other's company.

The man leaves the cab quickly, turning his face away from the driver, who notices the folded mackintosh carried over his arm. Eliza lingers to stroke the horse on his nose before paying her fare.

"You have a nice horse," she tells the cabbie.

The next morning, beautiful Eliza is found by her boyfriend, William Hubbard, lying in a vast pool of her own blood. Still wearing her dressing gown, stays and underskirts, she has been stabbed in the back of the neck by a short bayonet knife, then had her throat cut with such force that her windpipe and gullet are completely severed. Her killer has left her with three more dreadful ripping wounds to the abdomen, made post-mortem. Leaving eight florins, the price agreed for staying the night, lying on her dressing table, he has walked out instead with a purse full of gold guineas.



Hubbard cannot believe what he is seeing. Though fully aware of how Eliza made her money, he had not heard a sound coming from her room the night before. Neither, it turns out, did the other residents of the house, lodger Mary Glover and her companion, William Best. The only soul to have stirred throughout Eliza's ordeal is her spaniel, who, smelling the blood from his place of confinement in the kitchen below, is reported by neighbours to have given a couple of timid barks. It is as if the Devil himself passed through the household.

Inspector Charles Frederick Field, of Robert Peel's New Police, is the first officer to arrive at the scene. This former amateur actor has enjoyed rapid promotion to his position at the 'L' or Lambeth Division, possessing the shrewd intelligence necessary to work in a part of the city teeming with rookeries and brothels. Having worked this beat for the past five years, Field is already acquainted with Eliza, or 'the Countess' as she is known, on account of her elegant appearance. But, as he would later tell close friend Charles Dickens, who drew upon the case for the writing of Nancy's death scene in Oliver Twist, when it came to catching Eliza's murderer, he had met with his career's nadir.

> *This mesmerising work of time-travelling detection is both chilling and convincing*

Because of the amount of blood that had flown from the corpse, Field was immediately suspicious that the murderer could have committed such a crime in silence and then flown the scene without leaving a single, incriminatory mark of his passing. Despite extensive questioning of neighbours, cabmen and the many night-dwellers of the vicinity, no one had seen a blood-splattered man fleeing Wellington Terrace or running back across Waterloo Bridge. Eliza's professional acquaintances gave the Inspector descriptions of her companion on the fateful evening, but despite the wealth of detail about the mysterious 'Foreigner', popularly dubbed 'Don Whiskerando', offered to him, Field was more inclined to believe that William Hubbard was the guilty party. Hubbard was arrested and questioned by magistrates, who found no compelling reason to prosecute. He was released to a haunted, early death, and the case remained unsolved, passing into speculation and legend, before fading from the public consciousness.

But the redoubtable Jan Bondeson does not want these shades to rest and the case he presents in this mesmerising work of time-travelling detection is both chilling and convincing.

Reasoning that this killer was doing his work for sadistic kicks and was so practised at it that knew how to get away with the perfect crime, Bondeson burrows his way back through contemporaneous crime reports for murders displaying a similar modus operandi that could be linked to the description of the Foreigner. Sifting and discounting numerous red herrings, he alights on two more likely cases – including the unsolved murder of another woman named Eliza in 1837. Weighing his evidence with reasoned argument and an elegant turn of phrase, it is difficult not to concede that Bondeson has succeeded where the morose Inspector Field failed – and take heart in his summation that, in the end, the Devil caught up with the mysterious Don Whiskerando…

Cathi Unsworth

★★★★☆

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Bad day at the office

If you already thought that work was hell, this new offering from director Greg McLean and writer James Gunn serves up enough blood-spattered stationery to confirm your worst nightmares...

The Belko Experiment

Dir Greg McLean, US 2016

On UK release from 21 April

As the employees of Belko Industries arrive at their office building for another day of work, they are greeted by unusually heavily armed security. Not thinking much of this, as violent crimes are not unusual in Colombia where the American employees are stationed, everybody goes about their business as usual. However, heavy metal shutters suddenly encase the building and an eerie voice sounds out across the office, telling the trapped office workers that they must kill a handful of their colleagues. Should they fail, the unseen voice informs them, the result will be the death of a substantially larger number of their fellow workers. Initially assuming that they are being pranked, the employees soon learn that the threat to their lives is in fact very real, as they are asked to kill more and more people within a certain time frame lest whoever is conducting this cruel game do it for them. Thus, the fight for survival begins and the terrified office workers must kill or be killed; but does the average office worker have what it takes to kill innocent people?

> *Does the average office worker have what it takes to kill innocent people?*

Since it's helmed by *Wolf Creek* director Greg McLean and written by *Guardians of the Galaxy* writer and director James Gunn, one expects *The Belko Experiment* to be plentiful in terms of both gore and wit. Thankfully, both elements are present in good measure, with visuals and scenarios that are equally grim and humorous; the result is highly entertaining kibble for gorehounds with a dark sense of humour. While the idea itself is hardly original, the writing, directing and acting makes it an enjoyable if simple horror film. The special effects are sufficiently gruesome and the performances are decent, with John Gallagher Jr particularly good as everyman Mike Milch. As for the story, Gunn's decision to occasionally defy the horror formula by throwing character expectations out the window keeps things fresh and ensures that tension is maintained throughout the film.

However, while *The Belko Entertainment* is enjoyable as a disposable bit of blood-spattered entertainment that will change how you look at stationery supplies, it manages to accomplish neither the absurdly excessive level of violence associated with the Japanese *Battle Royale*, nor does it have as much depth as the carefully constructed *Cabin in the Woods.*

Leyla Mikkelsenn

★★★★☆

Ghost in the Shell

Dir Rupert Sanders, US 2017

On UK release from 30 March

In a future obsessed with cybernetic enhancements, Major (Scarlett Johansson) succumbs to the injuries she has suffered in a terrorist attack, but scientists manage to save her brain and place it in a manufactured body before her natural one perishes. Being the first of her kind, she joins Section 9, where she becomes the ultimate weapon in the fight against cyberterrorists who hack and control people's minds. However, when a new enemy emerges and her memory begins to glitch and reveal things from her past, Major questions the circumstances of her rebirth, and as the lines between good and bad become increasingly blurred, she suspects that her life was not saved, but stolen.

Live action adaptations of anime rarely result in anything but varying degrees of frustration, so it's understandable that most people familiar with *Ghost in the Shell* were apprehensive about this influential franchise getting the Hollywood treatment. The main focus of this particular adaptation is the 1995 animated feature, although liberties have been taken to alter the plot and to borrow from other *Ghost in the Shell* storylines. Scarlett Johansson delivers a good performance as the Major, utilising her more-human-than-human shtick to its full extent while also adding a subtle tinge of humanity to the character. Boasting stunning visuals, the film showcases both highly detailed production design and expert cinematography. In fact, the visuals are often so beautiful that one is reminded how much inspiration the animated version took from *Blade Runner*, and

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com)

House: The Collection

Dir various, US 1985-1992

Arrow Video, £34.99 (Blu-ray)

You mightn't have realised that there *were* sequels to the 1985 hit comedy horror *House*. But now Arrow video lets you romp through the entire collection on Blu-ray – and what a kooky ride it is.

The first is still the best. William Katt plays a Vietnam vet haunted not only by the trauma of war but also by the fact his aunt's creepy house has somehow abducted his son. What's so effective about the film is how well balanced it is. It's actually pretty spooky in places, but then a gonzo fright gag will appear, like when Katt has to chop up a morbidly obese demon in an evening dress while the Shirelles play on the soundtrack. George Wendt (Norm from Cheers) is a key addition to the cast, giving his lines a downbeat comic edge that had me chuckling: "Solitude's always better with someone else around." There's even a serious story lurking here too, about how veterans deal with post-traumatic stress disorder. Naturally, the ideal horror movie motif for that is the haunted house, where sufferers have to face a constant parade of spectres they'd rather forget. It's not a perfect film by any means, but once the sequels start rolling you'll think it's Citizen Kane.

House II: The Second Story (1987) jettisons any attempt to scare. Now, we have a couple of party dudes hanging out with a long dead Grandpa from the old west who's trying to protect a crystal skull. Something like that, anyway. Dinosaurs, cowboys, cutesy little worm dogs and a cool stop-motion zombie horse show up in a film that probably works perfectly as a Saturday morning kids show. But as a follow-up to the mighty *House*, the film tips way too far into the 'funny ha ha' bracket.

> *"It's not a perfect film, but by the time the sequels start rolling you'll think it's Citizen Kane"*

The third instalment is *House III: The Horror Show* (1989), and it skews in the completely opposite direction. Instead of family-friendly laughs we get a brutal, uber-gory, profanity filled serial killer movie, with an almost identical plot to Wes Craven's *Shocker* (which came out later the same year). Lance Henriksen even tears out his own guts at one point in this *Nightmare on Elm Street* rip-off. It ends up being a decent little horror movie, but you can tell that this was simply marketed as one of the *House* movies, rather than actually being made as one.

Finally, we get *House IV* (1992), in which William Katt returns only to be burned to death in a family car crash. But his presence still lingers, along with singing pizzas, insectoid thugs and a midget gangster. In all honesty, it's a totally ridiculous film, but I kind of liked the energy of it.

Watching the entire set of *House* movies is like seeing a waiter trying to balance wine on a silver tray. In the first film he has it just right; in the second he tips too far one way, in the third, too far the other. By the fourth, he gets the balance almost right again, but by then so much time has passed that you'd prefer to order something else instead. Yet, watching this topsy-turvy series trying to reclaim its original mojo is fun in itself. Nice set of extras too.

this adaptation too evokes the atmosphere of Ridley Scott's 1982 masterpiece.

But the tone of the film is also what will make it a divisive experience for the audience; while fans of the 1995 original may find enjoyment in the recreation of many a stunning image, the uninitiated may not be equally entertained. This is in part due to how much the pacing begins to drag in the second half of the film; Rupert Sanders's adaptation may get high marks for superficial faithfulness, but the acting and the story are not engaging enough to elevate the film from beautiful mimicry to good storytelling. These issues are only exacerbated by the decision to dumb down the philosophical elements, which detracts substantially from the overall experience.

The 'whitewashing' controversy over the film's casting has been sufficiently rehearsed elsewhere, and delving into some of its aspects would mean dissecting plot twists some would consider spoilers. The positive aspect we can take away from the discussion is that it will hopefully push Hollywood studios to reconsider how they go about casting such films in the future. Controversies aside, *Ghost in the Shell* is an admirable effort in terms of visuals and tone, which bodes well for the future of live action adaptations of anime classics, but stripping out much of the intricate philosophy of the original leaves one feeling that the film-makers didn't bring the ghost in this particular shell fully to life.

Leyla Mikkelsenn

★★★☆☆

Mindhorn

Dir Sean Foley, UK 2016

On UK release from 5 May

Failed actor Richard Thorncroft (Julian Barratt) has not had much success since playing the eponymous hero of the 1980s detective series *Mindhorn*. Scrambling to make a living, he awkwardly fumbles his way through auditions and meetings with his agent, but to no avail; no one has any interest in working with the self-obsessed has-been. However, Richard suddenly gets a chance to restore his former

glory when the Isle of Man police force ask him to assist them in a peculiar case. On the island, which was the setting for *Mindhorn* back in the day, a suspected serial killer has escaped from hospital, and he insists he will speak only to Mindhorn, who he is convinced is a real detective rather than a fictional character. Not being the sort to turn down some free publicity, Richard returns to the small community, convinced that the task will be a simple one. The plot, of course, thickens beyond his wildest imagination, and he soon finds himself in increasingly absurd and dangerous situations as he tries to revive his career by solving the strange case.

An established name in British comedy, Julian Barratt is perhaps best remembered for his role as Howard Moon in *The Mighty Boosh*, which he co-created with co-star Noel Fielding. The type of awkward comedy he displayed on Boosh is much to the fore in *Mindhorn*, where his portrayal of the obnoxious failed actor is both hilarious and cringe-inducing. Despite how many of the jokes land, however, the story gets stretched a little too thin, and the pacing does at times struggle as a result. When the film works, it brings to mind 2007's *Hot Fuzz*; but while Wright's film gained a following due to its high production values mixed with a superb blend of comedy and mystery, *Mindhorn* suffers from its low budget and a less suspenseful story. Sean Foley's debut as feature film director may not be a masterpiece, but manages to be highly amusing due to its preposterous premise and the comic acting chops of its stars.

Leyla Mikkelsenn

★★★☆☆

A Dark Song

Dir Liam Gavin, Ireland/UK 2016

On UK release from 7 April

Sophia (Catherine Walker) is a young woman grieving over the death of her son. So distraught is she, and so desperate to once again be in contact with her child, that she decides to enlist the aid of supernatural forces. Her guide is a very odd fellow (Steve Oram), whose experience of dark summoning rituals will, Sophia hopes, conjure a being able to grant her wish. The film charts the progress of this tortuous and borderline torturous rite.

This is without doubt one of the most singular films you're likely to see this year. Its basic premise is familiar enough, but whereas most films on similar lines would get the summoning over in 10 minutes and spend the rest of the running time showing the beastie running amok, *A Dark Song* does the exact opposite, spending virtually all of its 90-odd minutes detailing the intricacies of the esoteric ritual – the cleansing; the chalk circles; the sexual rites. That sets it apart but, equally unusually, it's also a virtual two-hander for the leads.

It's not an easy film or necessarily a likeable one, and that's to be applauded in this age of the slick and forgettable. For much of the time what we see is a battle for psychological supremacy between the two characters, with the upper hand in the bizarre relationship being gained and lost several times. If you're looking for spinning heads and projectile vomiting, you won't find it here. What you will find, though, much more interestingly, is a genuinely serious-minded look at the nuts and bolts (if that's the right expression, and I'm not sure it is) of the occult. I'm not well placed to tell you how authentic it all is, but it seemed convincing to me.

Although there is a determination to deal with its subject matter seriously, the film isn't po-faced about it and is helped enormously by Steve Oram's performance as the arse-scratching Brummie occultist Mr Solomon. By turns intimidating and ridiculous, Oram really throws himself into the part and although some will find his performance annoying he is right at the heart of what makes the film work – that is to say the contrast between the everyday and the fantastic.

I won't reveal whether the rite is ultimately successful but I will say the ending is appropriate and satisfying. There is of course a strong supernatural element and, at times, even some horror trappings, but this is not a conventional genre film. But if you want something different, then you'll get a lot out of this unusual and impressive film from a promising debut director.

Daniel King

★★★★☆

SHORTS

THE BEASTER BUNNY

Second Sight Films, £5.99 (DVD)

This movie is terrible. The acting is terrible; the sound design is terrible; the editing is terrible; the special effects are terrible, and the premise is – you guessed it – terrible. However, some films do not strive to be cinematic masterpieces, and *The Beaster Bunny* is fully aware of its own shlock factor. With a minuscule budget and a hare-brained plot, this movie about a giant rabbit on a carnivorous rampage has its tongue planted firmly in its cheek and manages to provoke quite a few laughs though it loses its silly steam for long intervals, which at times makes it tedious for even the keenest connoisseurs of crap cinema. In terms of holiday-themed horror, it's nowhere near the levels of low-budget hilarity found in classics like *Jack Frost: The Mutant Killer Snowman*. **LM** ★★

ZOMBIE LAKE

Black House, £7.99 (DVD)

Like Nazis? Like zombies? Like pendulous breasts and underwater vaginas? Holy Moly, you've found your perfect movie in this French horror/nudie from Jean Rollin! The tale of a lakeside town terrorised by long-dead soldiers is surprisingly gentle-hearted. The scenes of Nazi ghouls chomping down on bathers look more like kissing than eating. The sexual element feels innocent too. There's no hardcore romping here – just pretty ladies stripping and frolicking in the water. *Le Lac Des Mortis Vivants* is a cool little horror, which looks excellent, even if this is only DVD; and the disc boasts an extra I've never seen in my life: 'Alternative Clothed Scenes' **PL** ★★★

PIECES

Arrow Video, £19.99 (Dual Format)

Surely this Spanish film is one of the most entertaining slasher movies ever made? It's like a mash-up of *Murder She Wrote* and *Friday the 13th*, only with way more gore and way more laughs than either. The first 20 minutes say it all really: a mother catches her young son doing a jigsaw of a naked girl – just as he's about to fit the final piece between her legs. Mum flips and tries to burn his porn, so he hacks her to... pieces... geddit? Next scene: a girl randomly rollerblades through a mirror. Next scene: a student gets her head chainsawed off. The rest of the film is a jumpily edited, ridiculous delight. Some of the killings are pretty brutal, so you'll need a strong stomach; but if you're receptive to it, you'll be laughing throughout. It's also got the finest use of the word 'bastard' in movie history. The Arrow package is a treat too, with a whole bunch of extras and a copy of the complete funky soundtrack on CD. Genius! **PL** ★★★★

WE ARE THE FLESH

Arrow Video, £14.99 (Blu-ray), £12.99 (DVD)

This Mexican arthouse shocker is doubtless a bit of political allegory/social comment about something or other – at least that's what all the violent and portentous imagery evoking birth, death and the Holy Sacrament would suggest – but that doesn't mean it's any good, despite the claims of talking head Virginie Sélavy, who tells us that its director "positions himself within a history of transgressive thinkers and artists"; to which one's immediate response, is "No shit, Sherlock!" Sadly, pound-shop Pasolini and Jodorowsky wannabe Emiliano Rocha Minter (whom an interview reveals to be separated at birth from Milo Yiannopoulos) simply batters the viewer with incest, cannibalism, waving willies, cavernous fannies and streams of menstrual blood in an effort to disguise just how dull the film actually is. By the time it ended, I felt as if I'd spent 70 minutes sitting in my own excrement wanking myself off; and not in a good way. **DS** ★★

SOUNDS PECULIAR

BRIAN J ROBB PRESENTS THE FORTEAN TIMES PODCAST COLUMN

As a medium, podcasts have been enjoying something of a boom over the past few years. The democratisation of quality media production through high-specification computer equipment has allowed a plethora of previously marginalised voices their own access to what were once quaintly called ‘the airwaves’.

In the past, broadcasting (reaching a wide audience from a single source) was heavily regulated and controlled, mainly through frequency scarcity: only those authorised or licensed to have access to the airwaves were allowed to broadcast. In UK terms that, initially, meant the BBC, with commercial stations coming along in the 1960s.

In terms of radio, there have been amateurs since the invention of the medium, reaching a crescendo with the off shore ‘pirate’ pop station of the 1960s that ultimately led to the BBC launching Radio 1. For the longest time, Radio 4 (or NPR in the US) has been the default home of quality ‘spoken word’ content, whether that was drama, current affairs, or documentary radio.

Now, anyone with a microphone and an iPad, laptop, or computer and the right software can produce a decent podcast and launch their work onto a waiting world. Not all of them are good, while many are far better than you might expect, sometimes surpassing the productions of ‘legitimate’ broadcasters like the BBC or NPR. When it comes to fortean topics, there are a host of podcasts out there, ranging from the polished and compelling to the amateurish and downright weird. SOUNDS PECULIAR will be your insider guide to the best of the current podcasts dealing with fortean topics: all you have to do is sit back and listen...

LORE
SOMETIMES THE TRUTH IS MORE FRIGHTENING THAN FICTION
ABOUT EPISODES SHOP LIVE SHOWS

Podcast: Lore
www.lorepodcast.com
Host: Aaron Mahnke
Episodes Count: 50
Format: Solo voice, reading
Established: March 2015
Frequency: Fortnightly, Mondays
Topics: True-life haunting folklore stories from history
Awards: iTunes Best of 2015

Aaron Mahnke didn’t set out to be a podcaster – he wanted to be a novelist. He wrote and published a handful of novels, some based on old tales and folklore, a central interest for him – he lives in Lovecraft and Salem country in America’s north-east.

His popular podcast *Lore* began life as an idea for a short eBook on folklore topics. He’d dabbled in podcasts before, and often listened to audiobooks whilst out running. The two finally came together in Mahnke’s head, with a little help from hit Podcast Serial, and he asked himself why there wasn’t a podcast telling true stories that were slightly spooky or a little bit odd – just the sort of thing he’d been researching for his planned folklore eBook. As there wasn’t, he set about creating one, and the result was *Lore*. Within a year, it had become a full-time job, earning him an audience and an income.

When it comes to podcasts, *Lore* is simplicity itself. Over an atmospheric bed of ambient piano music, Mahnke narrates his chosen tale. His voice is reassuring and seductive, but with an edge. His matter-of-fact delivery is great for bringing out the horror of some of the tales. Mahnke’s deadpan, slightly nasal, almost-but-not-quite emotionless delivery is ideal for the strange topics covered. *Lore* is ideal for late-night listening, sitting by the fire as a winter storm rages outside, and Mahnke is the perfect host.

An early highlight of the series was episode eight, entitled ‘The Castle’, released in June 2015. This recounted the still unbelievable, but entirely true (as all the podcast’s tales are) story of the late-19th century Chicago serial killer HH Holmes and the weird hotel he built, dubbed the Murder Castle. Constructed to Holmes’s exacting specifications, the building was created to facilitate his killing spree. Mahnke tells this appalling history in his usual calm, reserved manner, making it all the more terrifying.

> *Mahnke relates this appalling history in his usual calm manner, making it all the more terrifying*

Other topics covered in the (to date) 50-odd episodes of *Lore* include old perennials, such as stories of vampires and ghosts, tales of creatures currently unknown to man, and (probably most often of all) the terrible things that people do to each other. These are the sort of tales that might give rise to bump-in-the-night campfire tales or form the foundations of the spooky folklore we know today, but more often that not there is some real event or other at the heart of such retellings.

Mahnke is simply a storyteller, who on his website says: “I believe people innately hunger for story. We enjoy a well-told, well-written tale. It allows us to escape for a moment and live in someone else’s world, a world where problems have solutions (most of the time) and things make sense (again, mostly). Story is in our DNA.”

His podcast is both a way for him to explore these haunting stories for himself (his research is in-depth and meticulous), and a method by which he can indulge his compulsion for storytelling and communicate his tales to others. “I’m welcoming listeners into another world, a world that’s sitting right behind our own, one that feels both comforting and frightening. Give me your imagination and less that 20 minutes, and I’ll take you somewhere, teach you something, and entertain you.”

That brevity might also be the key to Lore’s success (the show has 3.5 million monthly listens and 4,400 5-star reviews on iTunes). Keeping things down to a tightly scripted 20-minute duration, Mahnke has ensured that *Lore* is suitable for even the briefest of commutes, a daily run or a walk to the store. If, like many, you find yourself hooked after just one or two episodes, it is equally possible to binge-listen to the lot over a few days. The episodes are best savoured, however, at Mahnke’s nicely-paced fortnightly rate of production.

It looks as if there’s going to be even more *Lore* in the future. Mahnke recently completed a deal with the producers of *The Walking Dead* to bring the podcast to television. Whether the television series ever comes to fruition or what format it might take (an hour-long anthology series is being mooted), Mahnke guarantees one thing: *Lore* will continue in podcast form for a good while yet, possibly for a long as there is an appetite for spooky stories, well told.

Strengths: Mahnke’s delivery is smooth, yet edgy enough for the source material.

Weaknesses: Occasionally pushes too far on the ‘isn’t this spooky’ front.

Recommended Episodes: #8 The Castle; #17 Broken Fingernails; #23 Rope & Railing; #26 Brought Back.

Verdict: About as good as it gets when it comes to true–life storytelling.

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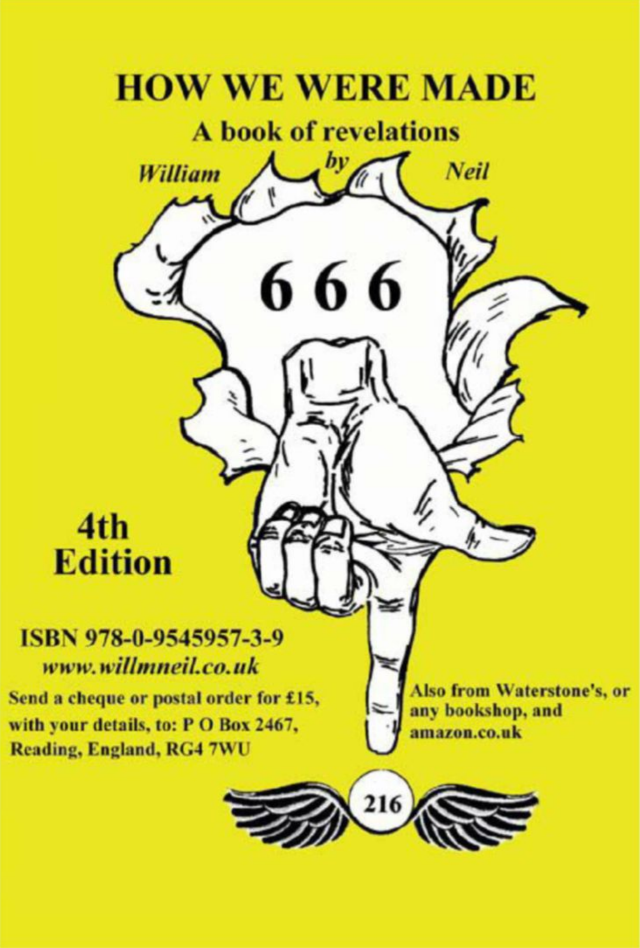
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Rumbled long ago

I was surprised when I read “The Chascomus Teleportation Hoax” [**FT351:56-57**]. The thesis defended by Dr Banchs is neither original nor new; it had already appeared in **FT192:56** (Jan 2005) & **FT194:73** (Mar 2005), when I informed you about the solution of this old story and offered some sources. It is strange that the punctilious Dr Banchs didn’t mention an article on teleportation published in your US counterpart magazine, *The Anomalist* #10, back in March 2002.

There, Alejandro Agostinelli and I wrote (pp.98-99): “The answer to the enigma arrived in 1996, when one of the authors (ACA) followed a suggestion made by another Argentine ufologist, Alejandro Chionetti, and met film director Anibal Uset, who admitted to have forged the story with the help of a journalist named Tito Jacobson and two other show business friends, in order to promote the film *Che, Ovni*, a roguish comedy that reached the silver screen two months after the alleged incident. Uset explained that the ‘witness’ who appeared in the TV show was his personal assistant and actor in the film, Juan Alberto ‘Muñeco’ Mateyko, nowadays a popular figure in Argentine television.”

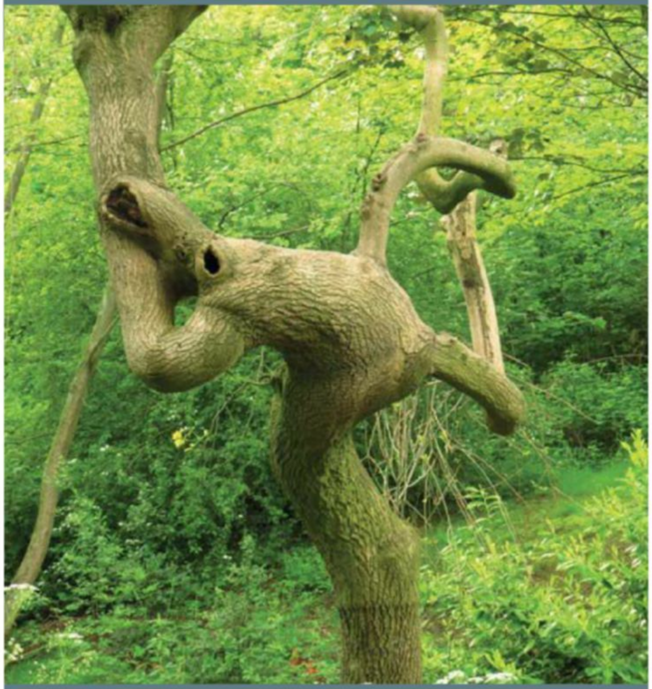
In that article we gave due credit to Mr Chionetti and even to Dr Banchs, himself as investigator and solver of a previous known Argentine teleportation case in 1959 (reported in *Flying Saucer Review*). The article was also translated and published in *Cuadernos de Ufología*, a Spanish magazine that had Dr Banchs among its contributors and subscribers, so his silence is quite embarrassing to say the least.

Dr Banchs says he interviewed Uset twice in 1998 and beyond reporting on his confession, no additional valuable information is provided. On the other hand, Agostinelli had interviewed Uset in 1996 and, as he explains in his book *Invasores* (2009) after giving once again due credit to Mr Chionetti, he devoted a chapter to explain the hoax and identify the false witness who appeared in TV and many others involved, such as the notary Rapallini, one of the alleged press sources, who denied any participation in the publicity stunt. You can also read about the hoax in his blog: http://factorelblog.com/2015/08/20/teletransportame-uset-in-memoriam-1939-2015/

Luis R González
Málaga, Spain

Editor’s note: this was just a case of editorial amnesia, I’m afraid. It’s tough to recall everything FT has published in nearly 44 years.

SIMULACRA CORNER



Paul Khader photographed this “swooning /dancing tree” in Sefton Park, Liverpool. “Its exaggerated pose never fails to raise a smile,” he said. “It looks quite scary at night, but in daylight it’s a charmer.”

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.

Science Friction

I was confused by David Hambling’s recent review of my book *Forgotten Science* [**FT352:60**], not because he disliked the thing, but for his constantly chiding me for denying that, when it comes to science, “an openness to new and crazy ideas is a rich source of discovery”, when this is *precisely* the idea the book promotes. He says that, after mocking odd old notions like cow-house therapy, the book “admits” that they ultimately led to genuine discoveries as if this is a grudging acceptance, whereas I show at length that good things often later came out of such trials. I *do* say that scientific knowledge progresses over time – but often in a zig-zag fashion, with some backwards or sideways movements, after Arthur Koestler. I declare the book’s ‘patron saint’ to be the proto-scientist Sir Thomas Browne, who made many bizarre mistaken researches together with several genuine discoveries, and lament there aren’t more of his kind around today – i.e. I want *more* daring theories, not *fewer*.

However, as Hambling says, the book is really *Great Sort-of-Scientific Eccentrics*, and is intended primarily as a compendium of comic tales, hence my milking the strangest ideas (including those of pseudo-scientists, who are clearly flagged) for laughs initially before then showing how some were actually not as silly as they seemed. The idea of progress I *really* take the piss out of is that of scientific utopianism, an amorphous movement that has in the past attached itself to the Nazis and Soviets, and has today also latched onto both Transhumanism and liberal humanism, an argument of John Gray. Scientists who deviate from the key shibboleths of this modern alliance between left-leaning humanists and science – honest climate-change sceptics, proponents of non-materialist models of the mind – are now shut down, often unjustly. I argue this is contemporary Lysenkoism and that we could sometimes do with more radical experiments like those proposed by Rupert Sheldrake, to shake things up a bit. Disagreeing with this viewpoint is fine, but it appears as if Hambling has accidentally conflated dislike for my rabid rants against delusions of scien*tism*-fuelled social ‘progress’ towards some imaginary New Jerusalem with my view of scientific knowledge as a whole. In other words, he has gleaned precisely the reverse message from the book as was intended, and ended up demolishing a straw-man of his own, in the shape of an argument I do not make.

The book doubtless has a number of errors, but some of those actually mentioned are errors of Hambling’s own interpretation: I *don’t* think gluing bugs to a windmill is perpetual-motion, the boyhood Tesla did, and I *don’t* deny methane can contribute to global-warming. Joke tabloid stories about CO_2 causing spontaneous breast-enlargement are compared to ones about globe-killing cow-farts purely on the basis that, viewed from an *imaginary* future perspective in

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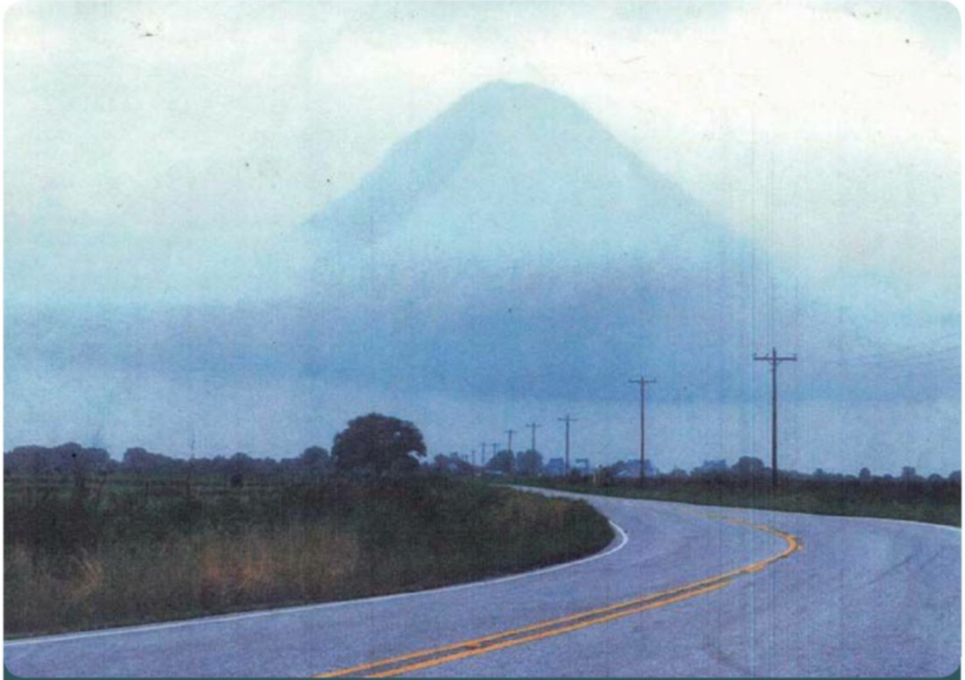


Aerial mystery

My cousin Mac Myers photographed this extremely peculiar cloud formation (if indeed that is what it is) near Welch, Louisiana, in March 2015. Can anyone explain how it was formed?
Scott Summerville *Danville, Illinois*

which climate-apocalypse may prove not to have occurred, they will both appear as laughable as one another and be written up by a future equivalent of myself as funny ideas folk once held. I recently had an edited extract published in an online magazine, *EdgeScience*, laying out my basic overall idea. Interested readers (presuming there are any…) can go to **www.scientificexploration.org/edgescience**, look at issue 28, pp.14-17, read the suggestively-titled *The Scientific Zig-Zag: On the Value of 'Crazy' Ideas* and judge for themselves whether the book makes the argument I *intended* it to make, or the one David Hambling *thought* it was making.

SD Tucker
Widnes, Cheshire

As easy as ABC

I'm glad that George Monbiot got the approval of Dean Ballinger for his "open- minded" stance on ABCs [anomalous big cats], as "experiential manifestations of the social imaginary" [**FT350:73**].

I had an email correspondence with George when he was researching the book *Feral*, attempting to answer the innocent questions that beginners always start with, such as where is the hard evidence?

GM: …If they existed you would surely find plenty of evidence for them: tracks, fæces, scratching posts etc. Where is it? Where are the photos? With my best wishes, George Monbiot.

Me: The points you make are valid, but not the interesting thing about the phenomenon. The intriguing thing is that *despite* the lack of hard evidence there are now many thousands of eye-witness reports which can be considered cast-iron.

It's this remarkable discrepancy between the testimony of good observers and tangible proof that is interesting. And there are other anomalies too numerous to list here. I detail them all in my book *Mystery Big Cats* – the book I thought would take me three months to write and which took me five years… That's the kind of subject it is – completely intransigent; and if you are prone to being annoyed by such things, annoying. What kind of questions one asks, and whether one likes wrestling with this sort of thing, I suppose is finally a matter of temperament. With all good wishes, Merrily Harpur

GM: Hi Merrily, Thanks very much for this, that's an interesting reply, and I'll certainly check out your book. With my best wishes, George

Me: Good. Thanks. Well let me know any further thoughts or queries you have. I'd be interested to hear them. Merrily

GM: Might there not be an obvious reason why black is the usual colour? It's the only pelt which leopards share with moggies. You never see a tabby, tortoiseshell, ginger or white leopard, so no cat with these markings could be mistaken for one. Reading the MAFF report into the Beast of Bodmin, which shows pretty clearly that the celebrated photos were of domestic cats, this explanation struck me forcefully. George

Me: Are you saying that *everyone* is mistaking black moggies for leopards…? Do you know anyone who has seen a black panther by the way? What about the pumas? No moggy resembles a puma. I'm not saying the problem isn't existential, but I suggest that that's not the best way into it. I *hope*, George, you haven't been reading MAFF reports rather than my book? The latter could save you a lot of bother. Just flick through it at the library! Merrily

GM: I will of course read both. But I haven't got to your book yet. G

Me: George, and I wouldn't say this except that I know you to be a great man with better things to do, you are wasting your time… don't pursue this! You'll only go mad, and the nation needs you sane. Or else you will ill-treat the subject, which wouldn't be worthy of you, or else… no I'll stop there. M

GM: Thanks Merrily, don't worry, it's only a minor interest. But isn't it one you want to encourage? G

Me: Yes and no… minor interest, good. But it's one of the subjects which the deeper you go into it the more it implies (demands?) a perspective which is alien to modern thinking, and I fear it might distract you from your real job. But also I fear for myself because I suspect you might possibly be on the scent of that perspective – I would like to think you were of course – but it's one that you can't easily mug up on, as for an exam, and if you go off at half mug I'll be cruelly disappointed. It not being a minor interest for me, and me having a belief in your free-thinkingness… Merrily

Well, George did read the book – twice, so he told me – and was kind enough to refer to it in glowing terms in *Feral*. And despite my imprecations, he did go off disappointingly at half-mug. But perhaps that didn't matter, par-

ticularly as I sold a book – and he won the approval of FT readers!
Merrily Harpur
Cattistock, Dorset

Just a distraction?

With regard to Jenny Randles's extensive articles on the Rendlesham Forest incident [**FT336–FT340**], I wonder if anyone has considered that rather than a UFO, it was a distraction to lure the guards away from the perimeter to allow unknown parties (Russians?) egress to the base. Other information mentioned supports this theory. Were the guards ordered back to help secure the site once it was ascertained that the perimeter had been compromised? Halt himself said that he did not want the incident investigating. Was this because the men in question did not follow procedure – falling for such a simple deception – and he faced being disciplined, maybe even court martialled, as this comedy of errors happened on his watch? The altered base blotter, allegedly by security police "who had seemingly decided to keep everything low key", also reveals a desire to conceal the events.
Stephen Watt
By email

Jenny Randles replies:
This is an argument that has, of course, been considered. On a secure base it can never be entirely excluded, but I think it highly unlikely for a number of reasons. Firstly, the events occurred on the perimeter of the Woodbridge base. This was a satellite of the main Bentwaters base that operated in a different location just across the forest. There were separate guards at both sites and Bentwaters was well guarded because it was where many of the major facilities were located. Woodbridge – adjacent to where the events occurred – was of lesser import. Secondly, the guards on duty were on a track on the outside of the smaller base, which was largely inoperative as it was the Christmas holidays. Even so, they had to send for back-up in order to be allowed to move more than a few yards from the road being patrolled.

Before any of them could move into the forest itself to go down the logging track and search for the object that had been seen falling into the woods from the secured gate, they had to await a security patrol to come from Bentwaters and relieve them.

This allowed two things to happen. A security patrol was now able to enter the forest and investigate on foot. But, crucially, the gate itself was not left unguarded as extra personnel were in attendance. The patrol from Bentwaters had cover from staff on that larger base before they left the main facility to go to Woodbridge east gate. Furthermore, the weapons of the patrol could be securely guarded at the gate because they could not be left unattended, in case guards were indeed being 'lured away' – but also because they could not be carried into the forest by American military, given that this was civilian British land. So at no point was either base left unguarded for more than a few moments when the initial sighting might have led to a brief distraction and a walk of a short distance on the gate road for a better view. During all the main phases it was properly 'secured' whilst the encounters were underway. On the second night, the base was as effectively guarded as it ever was, as those who went into the woods to investigate were largely staff technically off-duty as it was the middle of the night and – in some cases – at a base function – and many other off-duty airmen who were out there curious because of the events they had heard about from the first night. The base itself was under guard as it always was, and the air traffic control towers were manned to give base surveillance perspective from above as usual. Indeed some of the events were witnessed from there.

My articles, though covering several issues of FT, were focusing on the genesis of the story in those early months and years, not on the fine details of the witness testimony or explanations – of which there are many – part of the reason why this case still intrigues observers decades later. These assorted theories have been debated in many places elsewhere, both in previous issues of FT and in quite a few books about the Rendlesham Forest incident. In UFO history, only the Roswell event has had more books published about it.

However, because Brenda Butler, Dot Street and myself were involved from the very start and provided the first public commentary on the case to appear anywhere – in the media, in the UFO literature and in the first more widely available sources – and all before the case became world famous when appearing on the front page of the News of The World *almost three years after it happened – I thought it appropriate to focus on those first 34 months. So I set out to document what we discovered in the period before this incident became known to millions, when inevitably its nature changed forever.*

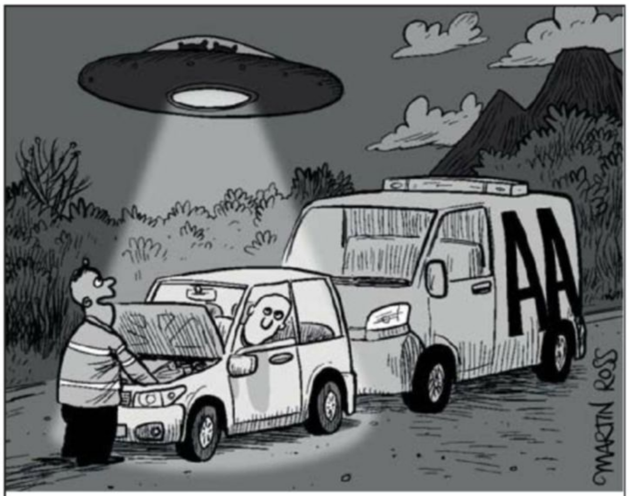
Satanic rumours

Re the account of George K Cherrie's inadvertent creation of a supernatural mystery in a Venezuelan cemetery [**FT350:56-57**]: in the late 1980s rumours of mysterious people called "White-Hoods" began circulating in the small border town of Dundalk, Ireland. The White-Hoods were apparently a mixture of the KKK and devil-worshippers. I believe the stories began when someone dumped the severed heads of cows and pigs in a park leading to my secondary school. On several nights my friends and I donned white bedsheets and brandished plastic daggers as we danced around a fairy-tree in the park. Rumours of Satanic masses in the park spread like wildfire until one night a large group of stoutly Catholic Irish travellers chased us with sticks and never to be forgotten cries of "Get the Toilet-heads!" Alas the White-Hoods were no more except in local legend.
P.S.: I might not always be in agreement with the views of SD Tucker's 'Strange Statesman', but it is definitely one of my favourite series in my 20-plus years of reading FT.
Paul Whyte
Dublin

Not a sea monster

The sea serpent that allegedly sank the German submarine UB-85 [**FT348:8-9**] is mainly an Internet yarn – it is hardly ever mentioned in a book. The first appearance of the case, according to my research (open to revision, like all fortean investigation) was in 1977, in a book by James B Sweeney, called *Sea Monsters: A Collection of Eyewitness Accounts* (D. McKay Company, pp.68-69). I have not so far discovered any source earlier than that – and none from Germany at all.

As one easily notices while reading Sweeney's book, he is highly suspect of having made



"Aha! There's your problem up there!"

PAUL TAYLOR

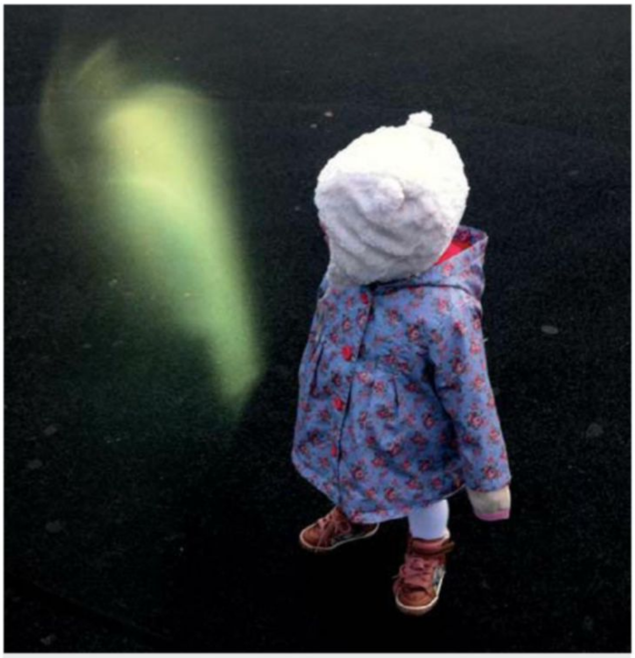
LETTERS

up many of his sightings from whole cloth, as Scott Hamilton in his blog "howcouldthispossiblybebad.wordpress.com" pointed out (thanks to Theo Paijmans for drawing my attention to this). We can be certain that the case is a hoax, not from WWI but from the latter half of the 20th century.

When UB-40 was located in the Irish Sea last year, almost all newspapers in Germany carried the fictitious sea monster story. The true story can be found in Robert M Grant: *U-Boats Destroyed: The Effect of Anti-Submarine Warfare 1914-1918* (Periscope Publishing Ltd., 2002, p.113): "The North Channel drifters scored again on April 30. Early that morning the drifter *Coreopsis* sighted UB-85 (Krech) and proceeded to shell her. The submarine was successfully escaping on the surface when Krech made the mistaken decision to dive. With the conning tower hatch jammed because of the gunfire, water poured into the boat, producing chlorine gas from the batteries, and she soon surfaced again. Krech intended to fight it out on the surface, but because of the water the crew could reach only nine rounds of ammunition. The U-boat stopped and fired a white Very Light. As the crew came on deck, *Coreopsis* fired seven more rounds to make sure of the surrender, then waited for an hour until other drifters arrived and took off the entire complement of the U-boat. The damaged submarine sank half an hour later. Krech explained his surrender as due primarily to the low morale of his crew, many of whom were suffering from grippe [influenza]. UB-85 had left Germany on April 16 for her first cruise."

That no sea-serpent was involved is confirmed by the official German Navy's War Diary, Sect.A, vol.1 (see *Guides to the microfilmed records of the German Navy, 1850-1945*, vol.1. National Archives and Records Service, U.S. General Services Administration 1984, p. 121).

Ulrich Magin
Hennef, Germany



Kindly light

Here is a picture of my daughter who appears to be looking directly at a figure of light that appears to have a halo, like a guardian angel.
Sophie Fletcher *Belvedere, Kent*

Two dodgy clerics

Regarding Montague Summers [**FT349:42-46, 351:72**]: one little-known aspect of his career is the extent to which his books were plagiarised. Reviewers of *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology* admired the book's scholarship whilst deploring its revival of the superstitions of the old witch-hunters. They might have been less admiring of its scholarship if they had taken a close look at, for instance, Chapter Three, "Demons and Familiars". This contains some two-dozen quotations from Catholic theologians, with the original Latin and French texts supplied in the footnotes, who all stated that it is possible for women to have sex with demons. These quotes had previously been printed, original texts and all, in the same order, in Canon Ribet's *La Mystique Divine*, 1865. Obviously, this method of research saved him a lot of work. He also provided a similar number of citations of records of English, Scottish and French witch trials, all taken from Margaret Murray's *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, but presented in such a way as to make it seem as if Summers had consulted the originals. He then had the cheek to devote 10 pages of his Introduction to attacking Murray's book. Thirdly, he gave a lengthy account of a witch's pact with the Devil, ostensibly from Guazzo's *Compendium Maleficarum*, 1608, but actually the somewhat garbled version in Sinistrari's *Demoniality*. This had been published, with an English translation, at Paris in 1879. In 1927 the Fortune Press issued a Montague Summers edition. In his Foreword he mentioned the earlier translation, which he described as "something worse that indifferent", but owned that "where there seemed to be some concise turn or happy rendering in the old translation I have not hesitated to avail myself of it in my task of englishing the Latin anew." In fact, comparison of the two shows that for the most part he had copied the previous translation word for word, merely changing the odd phrase here and there. He also provided extensive footnotes giving biographies of the many theologians cited by Sinistrari, every one of which was copied verbatim from the relevant entry in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*. He may have been a priest, but he did not regard the seventh (in the Catholic catechism) commandment as applying to literary theft.

- Saunière's wealth [**FT351:73**]: it is said that, during restoration work on the church in Rennes-le-Chateau in 1891, workmen raised a flagstone from the floor and saw the glint of gold beneath it. The priest promptly instructed them to take a lunch break, and when they returned there was no sign of the gold. It was later said that Saunière possessed, among other things, some 13th century gold coins.

Now, in the 13th century this building had not been the village church, but the private chapel of the Château (only the foundations of the original church survive.) Before the days of bank vaults, it was normal practice to bury one's wealth in a secret place. Consecrated ground was ideally suited for the purpose, as only a despicable person would dare defile it. This did not, of course, always work. In the 15th century Francois Villon, the only man in history to be famous both as a poet and as a burglar, learned that the Sorbonne kept their money under the floor of their chapel, and so was able to relieve them of it. It may simply be that the 13th century owners of the Chateau, and hence the legitimate owners of the gold, for some reason never retrieved it. Under French law, all treasure trove belongs to the state. Saunière may merely have been one of those (doubtless many) who have for obvious reasons kept their finds secret.

Gareth J Medway
London

IT HAPPENED TO ME…

First-hand accounts from *FT* readers and browsers of www.forteantimes.com

Phantom perfume

I found the "Nosewitness" feature [about smells associated with strange phenomena; see **FT350:30-37**] intriguing and would like to recount my own experience of a possibly 'paranormal pong'.

A few years ago I attended a close friend's funeral in his hometown, a couple of hundred miles away from where we had been acquainted, and on occasion shared rented property. My friend was a troubled soul, with a chronic alcohol addiction and all the chaotic problems that can bring into your life. In order to maintain the appearance of a normal functioning person, and possibly due to the diminution of the sense of smell caused by alcoholism, his would very liberally apply daily lashings of a particular designer cologne to cover up his boozy aroma. He would typically use up a large, expensive bottle of it every month.

Following his sudden accidental death from a drunken fall, the sad day came when I and a couple of his other friends made the three-hour or so drive to his funeral, listening to a lot of the music he loved passionately along the way. Within a mile or so of the crematorium entrance, the car became overwhelmed with a pungent aroma of the aftershave of which he was so fond, coupled with the rather rancid smell of stale alcohol, as might hang on the pores of somebody after a particularly indulgent night on the tiles. This smell hung about in the car for a minute or two, then seemed to disappear as quickly as it arrived, and we turned into the crematorium gates. I didn't mention it to the other two people in the car, but later on asked if they had experienced it, which neither seemed to have done.

The phenomenon may well have been a psychosomatic experience triggered by the emotional nature of the occasion and personal memories of my friend… or was it the ghost of our mutual friend joining us for one last ride in the car and saying "Thanks for coming"? Either way, it was a powerful experience, and does feel like a kind of last goodbye.

Jules Landau
By email

"Nosewitness" reminded me of something from 30 years ago, when I was working as a physiotherapist at the now-defunct St Edwards Mental Hospital in Cheddleton, Staffordshire. My residence was a large two-bedroom house in the grounds. My partner slept in a separate bedroom (because he snored), and I shared my room with our lovely crossbreed dog, a rescue male called Holly, who had his box-bed at the foot of mine. One night I woke up to experience the most beautiful scent in the room – which was strange, as I never use perfume of any description. In the morning I sadly discovered that Holly had died in the night. I am convinced that I experienced the aroma of his passing spirit.

Diana Lyons
Leeds, West Yorkshire

My family had a lovely ginger tomcat, which unfortunately both my brother and myself were allergic to, though we loved him dearly. The cat became ill with cat flu and my parents decided to take him for a final journey to the vet. For weeks afterwards, we would suddenly become aware of the very strong smell of tomcat urine in a room of the house. If you left the room and went to another, the smell would follow soon after. This happened on several occasions to all members of the family. It seemed like the ghost of our cat, but entirely manifesting in the very odour that a cat would use to mark its territory. Are there any other ghosts made entirely of smell (whatever a ghost might be)?

Susan Beetlestone
Leamington Spa, Warwickshire

River ghosts

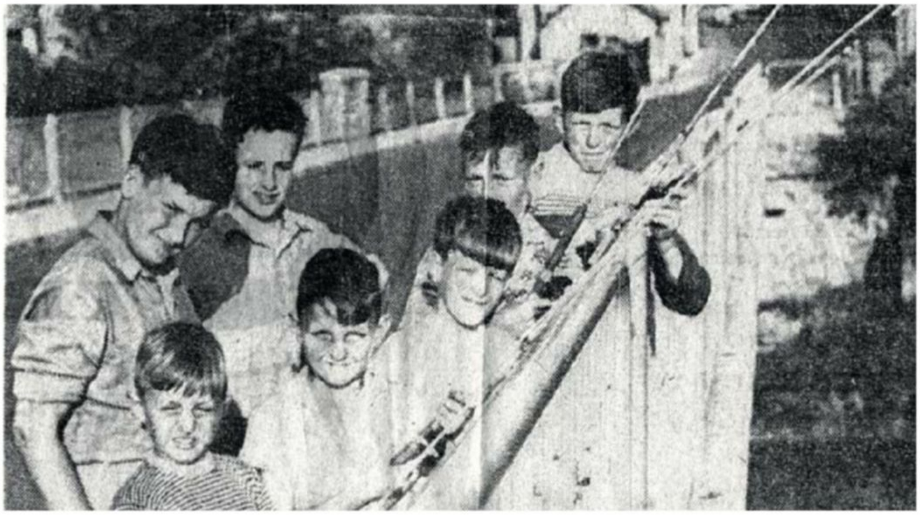
Having read 'Meeting Nicola' by Francesco Scannella [**FT350:75**], I could not help seeing a similarity with a strange encounter of mine, an account of which you published in 1999 ['Unearthly advice', **FT99:54**; see note below]. Both narratives, while different in content, involved rivers, Francesco's the Thames and mine the River Wye – and how the beings (ghosts or whatever you call them) vanished after a conversation. I wonder, do rivers attract ghosts or FIBs (Fluviatile Interdimentional Beings)? Perhaps water attracts them. The event still haunts me, though not in a menacing way. It defies logic.

He turned to call the elderly man, but he had vanished…

Below is a photo of the lads fishing off the bridge at Hay-on-Wye, published in the *Brecon and Radnor Express* in about 1960. I am the second from the left in the back row and about 13 years old, about five years before my experience. I was born in 1947.

Roderick Williams
Talgarth, Powys

Editor's note: One day when he was about 18, Roderick Williams was fishing off the middle of the bridge in Hay-on-Wye in Powys, Wales, when an elderly man in a clerical collar approached him and, learning that he had yet to catch anything, said: "Why don't you try straight down there?" As the man walked back the way he had come, Mr Williams followed his suggestion, cast his line and almost immediately hooked a huge chub. He turned to call the man, but he had vanished. "There was no way he could have made it across the bridge into Bridge Street in the few seconds that seemed to pass," he wrote.



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WHY FORTEAN?

FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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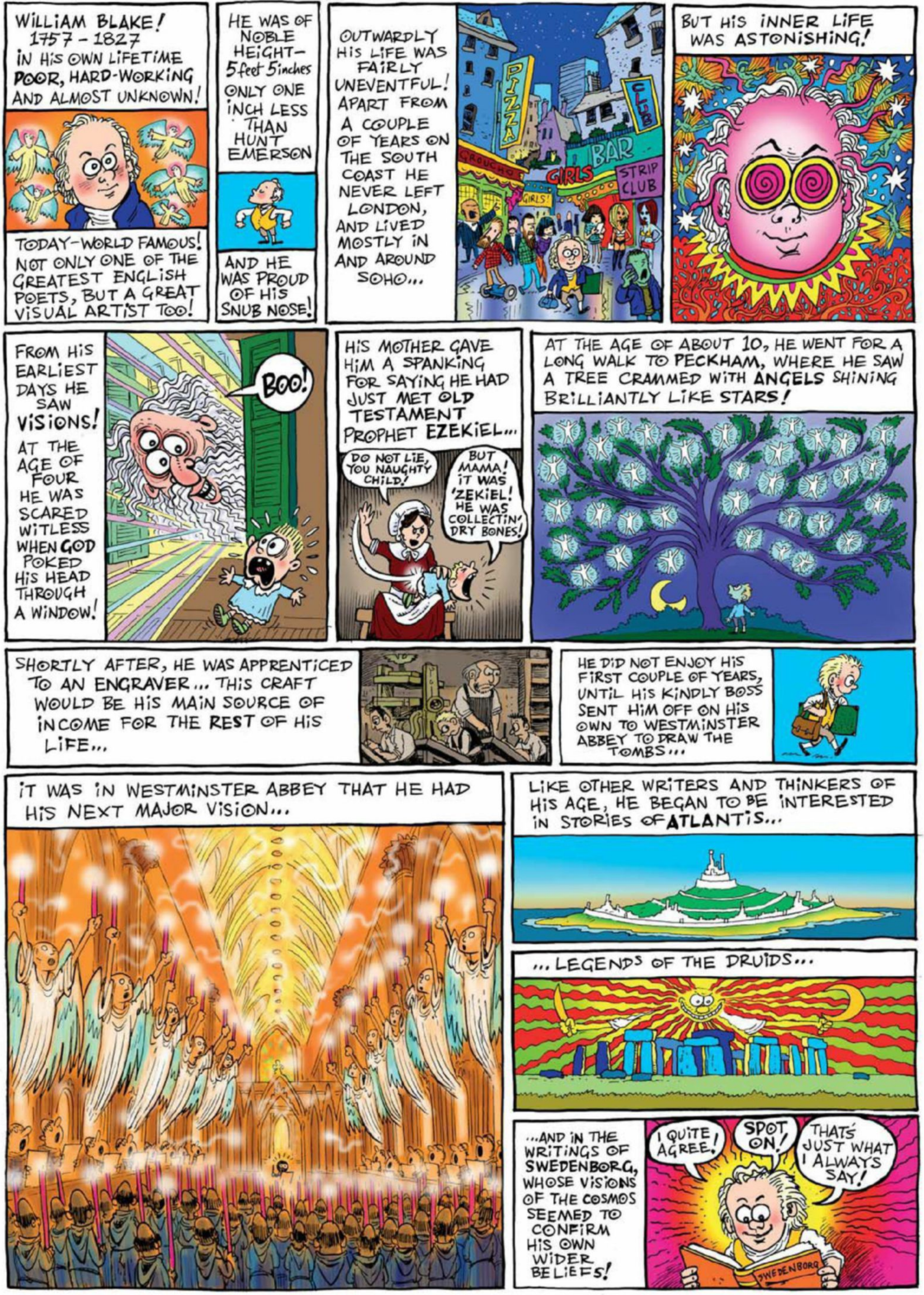
PHENOMENOMIX

William Blake 1

HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON


WILLIAM BLAKE! 1757 – 1827 IN HIS OWN LIFETIME POOR, HARD-WORKING AND ALMOST UNKNOWN!
TODAY—WORLD FAMOUS! NOT ONLY ONE OF THE GREATEST ENGLISH POETS, BUT A GREAT VISUAL ARTIST TOO!
HE WAS OF NOBLE HEIGHT— 5 feet 5 inches ONLY ONE INCH LESS THAN HUNT EMERSON
AND HE WAS PROUD OF HIS SNUB NOSE!
OUTWARDLY HIS LIFE WAS FAIRLY UNEVENTFUL! APART FROM A COUPLE OF YEARS ON THE SOUTH COAST HE NEVER LEFT LONDON, AND LIVED MOSTLY IN AND AROUND SOHO...
PIZZA
CLUB
BAR
GROUCHO
GIRLS
STRIP CLUB
GIRLS!
BUT HIS INNER LIFE WAS ASTONISHING!
FROM HIS EARLIEST DAYS HE SAW VISIONS! AT THE AGE OF FOUR HE WAS SCARED WITLESS WHEN GOD POKED HIS HEAD THROUGH A WINDOW!
BOO!
HIS MOTHER GAVE HIM A SPANKING FOR SAYING HE HAD JUST MET OLD TESTAMENT PROPHET EZEKIEL...
DO NOT LIE, YOU NAUGHTY CHILD!
BUT MAMA! IT WAS 'ZEKIEL! HE WAS COLLECTIN' DRY BONES!
AT THE AGE OF ABOUT 10, HE WENT FOR A LONG WALK TO PECKHAM, WHERE HE SAW A TREE CRAMMED WITH ANGELS SHINING BRILLIANTLY LIKE STARS!
SHORTLY AFTER, HE WAS APPRENTICED TO AN ENGRAVER... THIS CRAFT WOULD BE HIS MAIN SOURCE OF INCOME FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE...
HE DID NOT ENJOY HIS FIRST COUPLE OF YEARS, UNTIL HIS KINDLY BOSS SENT HIM OFF ON HIS OWN TO WESTMINSTER ABBEY TO DRAW THE TOMBS...
IT WAS IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY THAT HE HAD HIS NEXT MAJOR VISION...
LIKE OTHER WRITERS AND THINKERS OF HIS AGE, HE BEGAN TO BE INTERESTED IN STORIES OF ATLANTIS...
... LEGENDS OF THE DRUIDS...
...AND IN THE WRITINGS OF SWEDENBORG, WHOSE VISIONS OF THE COSMOS SEEMED TO CONFIRM HIS OWN WIDER BELIEFS!
I QUITE AGREE!
SPOT ON!
THAT'S JUST WHAT I ALWAYS SAY!
SWEDENBORG

COMING NEXT MONTH

HAUNTED GENERATION

THE ANALOGUE NIGHTMARES OF A 1970s CHILDHOOD

THE GREAT SEA SERPENT

THE DUTCH ZOO DIRECTOR AND HIS MONSTERS OF THE DEEP

+

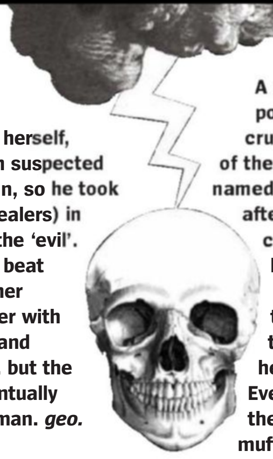
PLATYPUS VENOM, WIGWAM MURDER, FORTEAN LES DAWSON, AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 354

ON SALE 25 MAY 2017

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



When Soraiya Begum, a resident of Sajjadabad in Pakistan, begun talking to herself, her husband Nazar Hussain suspected she was possessed by djinn, so he took her to two Pirs (spiritual healers) in Naurangabad to drive out the 'evil'. The Pirs tied her to a tree, beat her with sticks, then tied her upside down and fanned her with smoke and heat. Her husband tried to stop the exorcism, but the Pirs ignored his pleas, eventually killing the unfortunate woman. *geo. tv (Pakistan), 9 Feb 2017.*

A man with six tons of pornographic magazines was crushed to death when a stack of them toppled on to him. The man, named only as Joji, 50, was found after six months when his landlord called round over unpaid rent for his flat in Kanagawa, Japan. It was unclear whether the stack topped on its own or whether the former car worker had a heart attack and fell into them. Even if he had been alive under it, the weight would probably have muffled his cries. *Sun, 4 Mar 2017.*

A woman in the remote Nicaraguan town of Rosita died after she was thrown into a fire to drive demons from her body. Vilma Trujillo, 25, a mother of two, was thought to be possessed after allegedly trying to attack people with a machete. She was stripped naked, her hands and feet tied, and then hurled onto a fire, suffering burns over 80 per cent of her body. Prosecutors said evangelical pastor Juan Gregorio Rocha and four other people had been arrested. Rocha denied burning Mrs Trujillo, saying demons had suspended her above the fire and then dropped her. In a different report, Pastor Rocha denied burning the woman, saying she decided to burn herself because "she was demonised". She fell into the fire after a demon had been expelled from her, he said. *BBC News, Eve. Standard, 1 Mar; <i> 2 Mar 2017.*

Five members of a South Korean family went on trial in Germany last October, on charges of beating a 41-year-old woman to death in an attempted exorcism. They included the victim's son, two cousins, and the elder cousin's son and daughter. The incident took place at the Intercontinental Hotel in Frankfurt in December 2015. The family members beat and suffocated the woman in an attempt to "cast out demons". They stuffed a towel and clothes hanger in her mouth to prevent her screaming. She endured at least two hours of torture before she died of asphyxiation as a result of "massive chest compression and violence to her neck". She had been witnessed talking to herself and may have been mentally ill. *D.Telegraph, <i> 11 Oct 2016*.

An 85-year-old woman died after her pet pig attacked her at home. She was bitten by the 300kg (661lb) animal she had been keeping in Strzelniki, southwest Poland. *Metro, 28 Feb 2017.*

Jeffrey Morris Brasher, 50, and his son Austin Blaine Brasher, 22, were killed in a head-on collision with each other at around 4:10am on Fayette County Route 49 in Alabama on 18 February. Neither man was wearing a seatbelt. State troopers say alcohol was a factor in the crash. Both men lived in Bankston, about 67 miles (108km) west of Birmingham. *[AP] 18 Feb 2017.*

Jon Henry, 50, was cleaning the windows of a house in Park City, Utah, on 3 February when a chunk of ice weighing at least 700lb (318kg) fell and hit him on the head, pinning him under the snow. "We're not sure how long he was there before he was found," said fire chief Bob Zanetti. "It was probably about 45 minutes." Rescue crews had to use a sledgehammer to get the heavy ice off him. He was flown to hospital but died from his injuries the next day. *[AP] KSL.con (Utah), 6 Feb 2017.*

Five members of a Benin religious sect died of asphyxiation on 28 January after they were told to burn incense and charcoal in locked prayer rooms while they waited for the world to end – or "the descent of the holy spirit" (reports differ). Several people were taken to hospital after the incident in Adjarra, near the capital, Porto Novo. The Very Holy Church of Jesus Christ of Baname sect opposes the voodoo religion – one of the major faiths in Benin. Members of the controversial sect have clashed with followers of other faiths. The group's young leader, Vicentia Chanvoukini, known by her followers as "Lady Perfect", has proclaimed herself a god. About 40 per cent of Benin's population are believed to be followers of voodoo. Voodoo Day is a public holiday and there is a national Voodoo museum. *BBC News, 30 Jan; D.Mirror, 31 Jan 2017.*

Could You Be A Writer?

The Writers Bureau's
Writer of the Year 2017
Sarah Plater

Marian Ashcroft talks with Susie Busby, Principal of The Writers Bureau, Britain's largest independent writing school, about what it takes to be a writer.

Who do you think can be a writer then, Susie?
Well, a writer is someone who communicates ideas through words. And most of us do that every day via social media … so we're all writers to some degree.

But can you really say someone is a writer if they text and tweet?
"Not really. I suppose when we talk about a 'writer' we usually mean someone who's earning from their writing. But telling stories to friends online is writing too. And even there, you come across people who craft their sentences and play with words, which is a good indication that writing is their thing.

So, do you need to be a 'special' person to study with The Writers Bureau?
Not at all! WB has been going for 28 years now, and though some people come to us with very clear objectives, others have little more than a vague desire to do something creative. Our students come from all sorts of backgrounds, and all sorts of cultures – leafy home-counties villages, bustling African cities, and everywhere else between. The majority haven't really written much before, so we give them skills, and a safe space to explore their options, then prepare them for approaches to the editors, agents and producers who'll eventually push their work out into the world.

But you must be looking for something …
"Determination. Apart from a reasonable level of written English, that's all we're after."

Not talent?
"Well, that helps. But talent's no good if you won't put the hours in. It's the same in all the creative industries. Like Mo Farah said back in 2012 – 'Anything's possible, it's just hard work and grafting.' And in our experience, grafting beats pure talent every time.

Okay, but if someone already has that 'grafting' spirit, where does The Writers Bureau fit in?
Well, to stick with sporting analogies, for any student ready to go for it, Writers Bureau is the coach in the background. Our courses and tutors build a new writer's confidence and help them find out what they're good at. We then show them how to get pieces ready for submission, so they've got the best possible chance of turning whatever talent they may have into proper, paid work.

Is that what happened with this year's Writer of the Year – Sarah Plater?
"Exactly. When Sarah first joined us she wanted to write novels (still does). But on her course she discovered a talent for non-fiction. She's now onto her fourth non-fiction book, earns half her income from writing, and runs a writing business with her husband – Mr and Ms Creative. We're so proud of her. She's worked hard and run with opportunities as they've arisen, which just goes to show what a little confidence and determination can actually do."

Any final words of advice for aspiring writers?
Apart from taking one of our courses, you mean? No seriously, I believe a writer must do three things. Firstly, read lots, and widely. Next, write as much as possible – ideally every day. And finally, learn to edit. Anyone who can do these three things is well on the way to producing great work.

If you'd like to find out more about The Writers Bureau, take a look at their website: www.writersbureau.com or call their freephone number 0800 856 2008. Please quote AT27417

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SAXON

Y&T • LAST IN LINE • GRAHAM BONNET BAND

FRIDAY 28

AT 4PM

SPIRIT OF ROCK
presents

Ramblin' Man Fair

29th JULY & 30th JULY 2017

REAL ALES ★ GREAT FOOD ★ FINE WHISKEYS ★ ROCK'N'ROLL

CLASSIC ROCK ★ SOUTHERN ROCK ★ PROG ★ BLUES ★ COUNTRY

MOTE PARK / MAIDSTONE

PLANET ROCK
WHERE ROCK LIVES
STAGE

SATURDAY

EXTREME

BSR
BLACK STAR RIDERS

DOKKEN

GLENN HUGHES

Reef

BRITISH LION

Toseland • Jared James Nichols

GROOVERIDER STAGE

RIVAL SONS

Scorpion Child

VINTAGE CARAVAN • **THE KYLE GASS BAND**

The Picturebooks • Lionize • Dirty Thrills

OUTLAW COUNTRY

KENNY WAYNE SHEPHERD BAND

DAN BAIRD AND HOMEMADE SIN

Steve 'N' Seagulls
Ghoultown • Whiskey Dick
Jessica Lynn • Caitlin Koch

SUNDAY

ZZ TOP

UFO

DIZZY REED'S Supersonic Blues Machine

MONSTER TRUCK

BLUES PILLS

Danny Worsnop • Stone Broken

PROG IN THE PARK

KANSAS

MAGNUM

FOCUS

MARTIN TURNER EX WISHBONE ASH

I Am The Morning • The Gift

BLUES STAGE

JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR

The Quireboys

TYLER BRYANT & THE SHAKEDOWN

Aaron Keylock • Big Boy Bloater

Rising STAGE

Wayward Sons • Blackwater Conspiracy • Bad Touch • Screaming Eagles • Trucker Diablo • Treason Kings • Aaron Buchanan & The Cult Classics
Knock Out Kaine • Skam • Kris Barras • Wild Lies • The Fallen State • KilliT • The Nile Deltas • Broken Witt Rebels • Massive

For tickets and festival information

RAMBLINMANFAIR.COM

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Eventbrite FOR TICKETS: WWW.RAMBLINMANFAIR17.EVENTBRITE.CO.UK

SUBJECT TO LICENCE

MORE ACTS TO BE ANNOUNCED!